

# PONSINGANOT

JIM LEFTWICH

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## PONSINGANOT

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## NOTES FOR DON HILLA

Yesterday you asked “what is a poet?”  
My reply — “let’s keep it simple: a poet is one who makes poems” — is a beginning.

Your response: “what is a poem?”  
“A poem is an attentive arrangement of words and (sometimes) images.” My response intended to be excessively inclusive. I would rather include writings which are not poems than exclude writings which are poems.

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Last night I noticed that William & Mary’s Garden Shop had a new sign. BULK MULCH.

Poetry arrives in all kinds of packaging.  
This is not a poem as written by the owners of the garden shop and displayed in front of their business. Consider-ations of compression and euphony alone do not result in poetry.

What happens if I remove it from its context and frame it as a poem?

### SPRING

#### Bulk mulch

Leaving aside for the moment considerations of quality, is this a poem?  
Let’s say it is a poem.

Is it a poem simply because I identify myself as a poet and I say it is a poem? Rauschenberg's telegram: "this is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say it is?"

This isn't what I have in mind.

Does the title create the poem? The title was already an implicit part of the sign. It is spring as I write this. It is in spring that such a sign is displayed in front of garden shops. The title doesn't label the words as a poem. It doesn't even suggest a "poetical" reading of the sign. It is a framing device. It removes the advertisement from the context of business and situates it in the context of language.

The framing requires or requests a specific kind of reading. It isn't the authority of the author that makes the poem, it is the special kind of attention required of the reader that makes the poem. We read "bulk mulch" as an ad when it's in front of the garden shop; our next thought might reasonably be "how much?" Framed as a poem entitled "Spring," we read it differently. We hear the repetition of the phoneme 'ul.' We note the difference between 'lk' and 'lch'. We might associate to "bulge" and "much." We might think about spring. Our attention is shifted out of its usual mode, in which considerations of practicality and utility are foremost, and into a special mode reserved for encounters with poetry. By simply framing the words as a poem, we invite the reader to think

about some of the concerns of poetry. The existence of the words "bulk mulch" as a poem depends upon the reader's willingness to attend to them as poetry.

Is this a good poem? That's not the question at hand.

What is the author's role in this? To act as a conduit, or a catalyst? A better question might be: is there an author of this poem? Am I the author? Perhaps I am the first reader of it as poetry. Is the person at the garden shop the author? He probably doesn't know that it's being considered as a poem. So, either we have an author who thinks he's merely a reader, or an author who doesn't realize he's written a poem. Perhaps you are the author.

If poetry is primarily about writing, about the process of writing, there is no need for readers. We can say, to misuse a sentence from Ron Silliman: "the purpose of the work was the transformation of the worker." If poetry is primarily about reading, we have no need for poets. An individual might train himself to read the entire world as a poem, to read each of the details of the world as poetry.

Let's confine ourselves for the moment to poems that are made of words (made, *poiein*, to make; not found). What does the poet do that the journalist doesn't do? My earlier definition of a poem

(A poem is an attentive arrangement of words and (sometimes) images) is not helpful here. It's too inclusive, too open, to be useful. What is essential to a poem that is not essential to a journalist's column, to a cartoonist's strip? Artifice is not the distinguishing quality; sitcom dialogue is all artifice; some writings published as poems seem to have none. If it's not metaphor, not compression, not euphony, not line-breaks or rhythms, tropes or tones, not image, music or idea (Pound's *phanopoeia*, *melopoeia*, and *logopoeia*), what is it that distinguishes poetry from other forms of writing? Intentionality? The author's attitude towards writing? This seems a little flimsy. But it may be getting close.

Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Do not forget that a poem, though it is composed in the language of information is not used in the language-game of giving information."

What, then, does the poem give, and the poet bring, that other forms of writing do not offer?

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"Since the Greeks, there have been two conceptions of the role of the poet: poet as seer, and poet as maker. That is to say, nearly all the metaphors and analogies that have been offered to describe the nature of *poiesis* concern either the poet's eye or the poet's hand. The former concerns mental representation (eidetic creation and alter-

ation) while the latter concerns the physical aspects of text production. These two descriptive modes are inextricably intertwined throughout the history of Western poetics." — T. V. F. Brogan, in THE NEW PRINCETON ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POETRY AND POETICS.

Apollinaire provides a dramatic twist on this distinction: "There are poets to whom a muse dictates their works, there are artists whose hand is guided by an unknown being who uses them like an instrument. There is no such thing for them as fatigue for they do not work, although they can produce a great deal at any time, on any day, in any country, in all seasons; they are not men but poetic or artistic instruments. Their reason is powerless against themselves, they do not have to struggle and their works show no trace of struggle. They are not divine, they can do without themselves, they are, as it were, an extension of nature. Their works by-pass the intelligence. They can be moving although the harmonies they strike are never humanized. And then there are other poets, other artists who wrestle. They struggle towards nature but have no immediate closeness to nature; they have to draw everything out of themselves, and no demon, no muse inspires them. They are alone and nothing gets expressed except what they themselves have stammered, stammered so often that sometimes after much effort and many attempts they are able to formulate what they wanted to formulate. Men created in the image of God, they will rest one day to admire what they have made. But the weariness!

the imperfections! the labour!"

Here the seer is the poet who labors. In the first instance, the "hand" is "guided" (not the eye). In the second, the work of making poems is what connects the poet with the divine.

We should insist on the primary importance of the work. The particular kind of attentiveness required during the process of making poems. The continuation of that work, that attention. Poetry as a discipline, a practice. In time, a source will make itself known. (I didn't say "the source.") Behind one veil is another veil. Attention opens to openings. The range of experience widens; the range of interpretation does likewise. Work with and on words might eventually become work with and on consciousness, perception. The potential is always greater than the actual. The possible grows into the real, as if returning to a present from residence in a future. The given is confined to, defined by, the range of our inherited assumptions. The world mirrors our beliefs. If the work of words is in time a work on consciousness and perception, then the work of words will be to increase our awareness of the world, an opening of the mind to the larger world available.

If we insist on materiality, on the experiential, on the particulars of a given setting, it is because we are certain of needing something to work on. Let's not say we are working on the spirit when we are in fact working on rhythm or syntax. Writing may be a path to enlightenment, but we work, while writing, on the materials available along the path.

We don't work on enlightenment, we work on words.

If we look closely enough at words, we might see how our current conception of the world is constructed. That glimpse will alter consciousness, will alter our perceptions, will alter the world. This might be construed as a kind of enlightenment. But this doesn't occur as a result of working on enlightenment, or as a result of considering the relation of spirituality to poetry; it occurs as a result of working on the materials of poetry, words.

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"The poet makes himself a visionary through a long, a prodigious and rational disordering of all the senses." (Rimbaud) Set against this, Silliman: "Not the senses, Rimbaud: disorder the sentences." If we are interested in, for example, taking a lot of drugs as a means of altering our perceptions, that is an available path, but it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with poetry. It might lead to poetry, and it might not. Silliman's instructions are specifically instructions for a poet, for someone who is working with the materials of the poem.

We shouldn't forget that Silliman's phrase necessarily recalls the rest of Rimbaud's dictum: The poet makes himself a visionary through a long, a prodigious and rational disordering of all the sentences. We don't escape the beginning of this sentence by insisting on the materiality of its end.

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There is a longstanding, mainstream position on poetry which likes to speak of the heart, the soul, emotion and the spirit, great feelings and great flights. Poet as hero, poem as expression of his heroic sensibility. Not surprisingly, many poets have cherished and nurtured this view of things poetical. This view is accompanied by its shadow, poet as anti-hero, "the great criminal, the great sickman, the accursed," as Rimbaud has it. It's the same story, poet as too sensitive to endure his imprisonment in the world. Either way, it's the poet as *übermensh*, as pinnacle of human attainment, pushing the envelope of human evolution. Is all of this simply rampant egomania on the part of the poets and fawning hero-worship on the part of everyone else involved? I doubt it. I distrust this vision deeply, for good and obvious reasons I think, but there may be a kernel of sense lurking somewhere in the story.

To find it, we have to work through the barrier of ego, we have to eliminate the kind of context in which elitism is able flourish.

After telling us that "one must . . . be a *visionary*, make oneself a *visionary*," Rimbaud goes on to describe the kind of work the visionary poet will do: "The poet would de-fine the amount of unknown arising in his time in the universal soul; he would give more than the formula of his thought, more than the annotation of his march toward Progress! Enormity become norm,

absorbed by every one, he would truly be the multiplier of progress!" Something very odd is happening here: the great visionary becomes an instrument of democracy, or of the democratic urges inherent in Marxism. Admittedly, the masses are still in a passive mode, absorbing, but the expressed goal of the visionary project is the elimination of the possibility for elitism. Everyone will participate in this progress. Fifty years before Surrealism, the seeds of Surrealism's intoxication with Marxism are being sown. Perhaps this is utopian nonsense, but perhaps not entirely so.

"The future, as you see," Rimbaud continues, "will be materialistic." This is the opening of the next paragraph, following close upon such phrases as "universal soul" and "of the soul for the soul." What sort of materialism is this, which speaks so loudly of spiritual matters? Is this just adolescent passion getting the better of rational thought, or is Rimbaud actually on to something here?

How does a poet go about defining "the amount of un-known arising in his time in the universal soul?" Rimbaud doesn't give us a manual, but there are clues scattered throughout his *ILLUMINATIONS*.

I dream of a War of right and of might, of unlooked-for logic.

It is as simple as a musical phrase.  
"War"

I am an inventor more deserving far than all those who have preceded me; a musician,

moreover, who has discovered something like the key of love.

"Lives"

Known enough. Life's halts. — O Sounds and visions!

Departure in new affection and new noise.

"Departure"

A rap of your finger on the drum fires all the sounds and starts a new harmony.

"ToA Reason"

The transformation that concerns Rimbaud occurs in and through the music of his writing. The materialism that concerns the poet is the materiality of the text, the words as the materials of the writing. Rimbaud is offering invitations to unknown worlds, but he isn't offering directions or instructions; he is offering poetry. Rimbaud is telling us that he has changed the world, and that we can participate in the newly discovered logic, the newly invented love, new affection and new noise, a new harmony. "Ask the poet for the new — ideas and forms," he writes in his letter to Paul Demeny. What Rimbaud gives us is new writing. There is only one thing for us to do: read it.

In "The Bridges" Rimbaud constructs a romantic scenario of symbolic images which draw us into a compressed myth of transcendence.

Skies the gray of crystal. A strange design of bridges, some straight, some arched, others descending at oblique angles to the first; and these figures recurring in other lighted circuits of the canal, but all so long and light that the banks, laden with domes, sink and shrink."

We are being set up. As odd as this description is, it is still familiar enough: the earth is represented not by a river but by a canal; the skies are gray, but it is the gray of crystal; the bridges are numerous and ambiguous; but the scene is set for a symbolic spiritual journey, the soul crossing a bridge from earthly squalor to crystalline transcendence. The center of the poem is a phrase which will not reduce to image or to paraphrase: "minor chords cross each other and disappear." Do what you will with that line; it stares back at you, an opaque silence. This is the new. As the mind attempts to decipher this cryptic phrase, the reader is given an opportunity to observe himself in the process of attempting to construct meaning. Consciousness gets a glimpse of itself in action. This is where transformation becomes possible in Rimbaud, not in anything he tells us, certainly not in anything he tells us to do, but in what he does, and in what that compels us to do as readers. From this still point at the center of the poem, Rimbaud moves into mocking references to "musical instruments," "popular tunes," "seigniorial concerts," "public hymns." All this is the cacophony of the old world. The new world is heard, if at all, in those minor chords which cross each other and disappear. The poem ends on a final mocking

note:

A white ray falling from high in the sky  
destroys this comedy.

The comedy which is destroyed is the dream of transcendence, and it is destroyed by the ancient symbol of supernal intervention, the white light from on high. A poem is made of words. Words are made of letters. Letters are things. Ink. Pixels. Reading is an act of the human body. Transformation takes place in the material world.

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from a letter to Mike Basinski, 4/28/97

I like this work a lot (*Riting as a Rigid Cupid*). Some of your lyrical interests are foregrounded here (these poems seem almost a bridge from the kind of work in VESSELS to the poems in ODALISQUE). (And ODALISQUE seems to lead to IDYLL and the other recent writings.) I don't know the chronology here, and don't pay much attention to this kind of linear development usually, but there seems to be a gradual uncovering in your work of the primary fact of writing as letteral. The letter as the unit of composition. There's a whole sequence of units — syllable, word, phrase, line, stanza, page . . . etc. — but one of the things your work does is to insist that the reader attend to the letter. Even if the page is the unit of composition, the letter is where the work gets done. And not just the work of writing, but the work of reading

as well.

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from a letter to Amy Trussell, 4/29/97

A few years ago I did a bunch of visual pieces, not verbo-visual poems, but something closer to paintings. I gathered garbage from around the house, and from around the town, scraps of paper and string and other junk, even found some cans of paint beside a dumpster, and made these découpage/collage mandalas, intensely colorful things, bits of trash stapled and glued to scraps of cardboard. The process changed the way I see. The finished objects weren't that important to me. I have a few still laying around, gave a few to Ken Harris and Taz Delaney, but most of them went back into the dumpster. I would spend days making these things, gathering the materials and putting them together, but when the process was over, the project was over. The objects were in the way. I thought at the time that I was doing something like salvage art, like some of Mike Kelley's stuff, maybe, but that wasn't it. It was process art, almost conceptual art. From useless objects through a process of art to useless objects, from the garbage can to the dumpster. I learned a lot doing these things: for one thing, I unlearned a lot of what I had been taught by art history. For another, I learned that doing something very close to nothing could be an extremely important experience. Lots of effort, but leaving no record of itself. Hours of intense concentration and work, but nothing to show for it. Except a new

awareness of what it's for, even when it does leave a record.

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from KHAWATIR, summer '94

#### GRENIER

Open *Oakland* to its middle pages and we find 'the lesson of the aluminum can'. First Grenier gives us "have they crushed an aluminum can." Nine syllables, six words, symmetrical, "have they crushed" equal to "an aluminum can," the weight, stress, duration, of "have they" balancing the extra syllables of "aluminum" (light, unstressed, shorter in duration), and the *c* and short *u* in "crushed" setting up the inverted echo of the *u* in "aluminum" and the *c* in "can." This is repeated four times, stated as the melody.

Next we find "have they bent an aluminum can." Here the line is asymmetrical, weighted towards the first half, the stress, weight, of "bent" having overcompensated for the extra syllables in the second half, even though "bent" carries the same duration as "crushed." The added weight or stress is produced by the *b* and *e*, by their uniqueness as sounds in this context. The weight is shifted by the removal of the echo we have been prepared to expect by the original sentence.

This is repeated four times and followed by a new poem which, including the title, contains fifteen words, nine of which contain long vowels (of which there is one, in "they," repeated eight times, in the previous sentences). This is followed, on the

next page, by another poem, ten words, four long vowels (one in the title, one in each of the next three lines, none in the fourth and final line), preparing us for a return to, but not a replica of, the original 'melody'.

"Have they made an aluminum can." This continues the shift in weight towards the first half of the sentence, the long vowel rhyme of "they" and "made" serving to anchor and isolate the first three words, so that the sentence seems to stop at mid-point. The original, symmetrical line has been broken into two lines, the caesura following "made" nearly as pronounced as an actual line break would be.

Grenier follows this with "have they rum an aluminum can," two lines written as one, symmetrical, the rhyme of "rum" and "aluminum" serving to join the two halves, even though the sense (or lack thereof) would seem to separate them. This works because of the "um," the unity of the sounds overriding the disunity of the "content," just as the disunity of the sounds in the previous sentence overpowered the unity of the "statement."

The "contents" of the four aluminum can sentences have the quality of pop or found-object art, so banal as to be unworthy of question or even interest. The context tells us what is of interest, what kind of attention we should pay to these sentences, and the disjunction, the non-sense of the last one underscores that: these are poems about how poetry works, how it is written, how it is read, what are the minuscule concerns of the poet as he

crafts a poem. Changing one word in the middle of a sentence alters the sentence entirely, with and without any consideration directed towards the "content" of that sentence. Listen to what happens when one *letter* is changed: have they hum an aluminum can.

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from KHAWATIR, summer '94

P. Inman, in *Ocker*, "a series for Robert Grenier"  
'82:

sit doption  
view lets dome bottled  
surnce

wall's dry-deen, tune drewers

harbor from in speech

and, later:

drune)rupts  
v i e w l e t s d o m e b o t t l e d, wouldn't be tilt  
of alphabet  
mmence cucumb (out of clock)

cact theme

With Inman, the space becomes the unit of meaning. Lack of spacing between words. Spaces added between letters in a word. The space occupied by

a single letter. The site of the sign.

What is it that we are *given*, with which to work?  
The em. The alphabet as type.

As silence in, say, a Monk solo, as the space held  
by a single note inside the silence. Duration.

As in field painting, working with the white of the  
page.

Spirit seeps in through cracks in the concrete, in  
the materiality of the language.

We can reach back and find instances in which the form is the unit of composition, the site of the work. The sonnet, for example, where all other considerations are secondary to those imposed by the choice of that form. A pattern of vowels might play an important part in the building of content, unfolding the sense enfolded in the form, concealing and conveying intended meanings, but the patterns determined by the form are primary. We might think for a moment that the letter is the unit of composition, the site of the work, but this isn't so. The letters are materials used at the site, and the range of possibilities for their use is delimited by the restrictions of the form.

The same can be said for the stanza, a quatrain, for example, or a couplet.

Also, for the line, one of five iambs, for instance.  
And for the sentence.

For the phrase.

The word.

Syllable.

As if there existed a twenty-six-tone base out of which innumerable formations might be made, including syllables, words, phrases, sentences, lines, stanzas, forms. Using the letter as the site of the work does not preclude the development of statement, for example. Nor does it privilege statement as a special configuration among all the other possible configurations of the letters.

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There is a page in BRAMBU DREZI Book 1 that begins with the poem:

hermit gathering roots, leopard guards  
his cabin, electrocutes my spine into  
child

fused shamrock flux from her central  
lesbian well chained simian daimon

carved mouth of ultraviolet stèle

Are we meant to take this apart word by word, symbol by symbol, allusion by allusion, to unfold it into an expanded, exegetical translation? I doubt it. I suspect that we are meant to enter the rhythmic ambience of a terrain, *temenos*, the poem as a sacred enclosure, a specific, present territory offered to our experience.

This page reads as a collage of poems. Beneath the opening poem are a series of glyphs: fragmented geometrical forms, abstract biomorphic shapes, suggestions of musical notation. Again: are we meant to read these glyphs as an array of symbols? I don't think so. We are being given, in the poem and in the glyphs, an experience of primal images, intimations of archetypal encounters. Once we subject this to the rigors of analytical mentation, we are no longer in the presence of the archetypes, we are removed from the primal power of the images by the exercise of rational scrutiny.

Beside the first poem is another poem, written in a form which suggests a list of words:

exodus  
fermenting  
in alembic  
vernacular

swimmer  
learns to  
fly, as  
clear as I  
know it

"As clear as I know it." To translate or paraphrase this is to diminish and confuse it.

At the bottom right of the page is an actual list:

aeon  
floods  
mouth

It begins with a series of words which can be read as statement. This echoes the form of the earlier list. But here the syntactical similarities end. The list continues:

child  
fish  
son  
nun  
man  
fish  
goat

What if we wish to look at the symbolism here, at the allusions concealed in this simple list of nouns, what do we get? Nun is written with a diacritical mark over the 'u', leading us to think of the Egyptian god of the primeval waters. Ra, the sun god, is said to have created himself out of these waters, so in a sense can be seen as child, as son (sun), of Nun. Nun is the unconscious, inanimate source, the void, Nothing: none. Arising from the waters, Ra is aligned with the fish. Fish and sun united in a single symbol. The ancient hermetic formula: as above so below. From Ra emerges the entire pantheon of Egyptian gods. Ra made love to his own shadow, pouring the seed into his own mouth. From the various unions of the gods, his children, come the rest of the living creatures. This section ends with the goat: the idea of the

scapegoat, of a sacrificial savior.

The list continues:

pneuma  
theatre  
conjunctionis

The pneuma is the breath, the spirit, the gnostic spark. What can the theatre be except the world? Conjunctionis is the second part of *mysterium conjunctionis*, the mysterious union of opposites, a hermetic and alchemical motif.

From here we are returned to child and goat, read as a *mysterium conjunctionis* of divinity and animal.

The next word in the list is the neologism "pneumathink." Pneuma is Greek for spirit; the gnostics were called pneumatics. To quote Hans Jonas: "Through his body and his soul man is a part of the world and subjected to the heimarmene. Enclosed in the soul is the spirit, or 'pneuma' (called also the 'spark'), a portion of the divine substance from beyond which has fallen into the world." Pneumathink, then, must be read as referring to a specific kind of thinking characteristic of pneumatics. Jonas again: "As alien as the transcendent God is to 'this world' is the pneumatic self in the midst of it. The goal of gnostic striving is the release of the 'inner man' from the bonds of the world and his return to his native realm of

light. The necessary condition for this is that he knows about the transmundane God and about himself, that is, about his divine origin as well as his present situation, and accordingly also about the nature of the world which determines his situation." The word which follows "pneumathink" in the list is "exodus," read here as "release," but also as a reference to the Hebrew exodus. Jake is creating a syncretic blend of mediterranean myths and theologies derived from the times leading up to the dawn of the first millennium. Writing of this period, Jonas comments: "The most important form in which the East contributed at this time to the Hellenistic culture was in the field not of literature but of cult: the religious syncretism which was to become the most decisive fact in the later phase begins to take shape in this first period of the Hellenistic era. The meaning of the term 'syncretism' may be extended, and usually is, to cover secular phenomena as well; and in this case the whole Hellenistic civilization may be called syncretistic, in that it increasingly became a mixed culture. Strictly speaking, however, syncretism denotes a religious phenomenon which the ancient term 'theocracy,' i.e. mixing of gods, expresses more adequately. This is a central phenomenon of the period and one to which we, otherwise familiar with the intermingling of ideas and cultural values, have no exact parallel in our contemporary experience." Jonas published his **THE GNOSTIC RELIGION** in 1958. Book 1 of **BRAMBU DREZI** came out in '93. In the 35 years be-tween these two events, our culture experienced an exact parallel to the

theocracy which occurred two millennia earlier. **BRAMBU DREZI** is, in one sense, one poet's record of that encounter.

From "exodus," progressing down the list, we arrive at "conjunction," further reinforcement of the syncretic mixing of gods and cultures. From there we come to "eye," read in this context as referring to vision, Vision, and homophonically to the self, the 'I'. The next word, "ma-chine," locates us in the current situation, as does the following, "virus." "[M]achine" has numerous definitions: "a system or device for doing work;" "an intricate natural system or organism, such as the human body," for example. "Virus" has three definitions: the familiar one of the submicroscopic parasite; "something that poisons one's soul or mind;" and, "a computer virus." We are moving from ancient metaphors and myths, taken from humanity's encounters with the natural world, into the modern world, where our metaphors and our myths might more easily originate in science or in the media. The syncretistic mixing continues.

The next word in the list is "solvent:" "a substance in which another substance is dissolved, forming a solution." This leads us to the final word in the list, "merkabah," taken from the Hebrew mysticism which preceded the written Kabbalah. The merkabah is "God's throne-chariot" (Gershom Scholem). The image of the merkabah comes to us from the book of Ezekial 1:26-28: "And above the firmament that was over their heads was the like-

ness of a throne . . . This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Scholem, writing of merkabah mysticism: “we have here a Jewish variation on one of the chief preoccupations of the second and third century gnostics and hermetics: the ascent of the soul from the earth, through the spheres of the hostile planet-angels and rulers of the cosmos, and its return to its divine home in the ‘fullness’ of God’s light, a return which, to the gnostic’s mind, signified Redemption. Some scholars consider this to be the central idea of Gnosticism.”

In Jake’s list of words, we have an entire Gnostic mythology, the story of the pneuma from its beginnings in the primal waters with the emergence of the autogenes, the self-created source, which is simultaneously the beginning of the beings of the world (“aeon floods mouth”), to its final return to the glory of the divine throne-chariot. There are no statements here; no grammatical pattern to guide our reading down the page. But, enfolded in the list, is the poet’s vision of being in the world — “as clear as I know it.”

In the left-hand corner of the page is a small world of words and images, many of the words too tiny to read. It is a reduced reproduction of the previous page in the book. At the four corners of the page are lists of words: toilet — sink — bathtub — train; straw — fork — hat — cylinder; baker — telephone — toil — yeast; absence — case — void — truck. This is machine and virus from the

other list, expanded as the four corners of our current situation. Jonas: “As a famous Valentinian formula puts it, ‘What liberates is the knowledge of who we were, what we became; where we were, wherein to we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we are redeemed; what birth is, and what rebirth.’ This knowledge, however, is withheld from him by his very situation, since ‘ignorance’ is the essence of mundane existence, just as it was the principle of the world’s coming into existence.” These lists at the four corners of the page are particulars of the world into which we have been thrown. It is through attention to the particulars of the world that the knowledge is gained which leads to gnostic liberation.

In the middle, bottom of this reproduced page is yet another reduced reproduction, of the previous page. *That* page contains a reduced reproduction of the page which precedes it. *That* page contains the page before it. The page which I have been reading contains the previous 5 pages, though this is barely visible to the naked eye. It is as if the history of the writing, the trace of the process, is embedded as a fractal record in the finished page. There is a sense of surfaces opening to reveal hidden surfaces, of veils behind veils, of an endless layering of meanings. There is also a sense of all that is prior being contained in the present. As we read we are entangled in an increasingly complex mixing, a world of words, a *temenos* offered as the site of our work during the reading.

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doing much more than translating, you are evolving the sense of the primary line into and through its associations, and you are highlighting its syllabic euphonies. The vowel patterns of “incredible magical” are treated as a sort of melody from which, by way of an improvisational reading-as-writing, you are able to change the “e” of “crEdible” to the “e” of “crEEd,” the initial “a” of “mAgical” to the “a” of mAgi.” The “echoes” are there, but so are resonant patterns of dissonance. Other instances here are more noticeably content-oriented, as when “my heart soars a new bliss” is echoed as “may art’s source enable us” — the “translation” acts as a sort of gloss on the original.

In each line there is an improvisational extension of the sounds which accompanies an associational extension of the sense. Suffice to say, I see/hear what you’re doing, and I like it.

## READINGS

Don Hilla

CRYSTALLINE ECHOES (For Joan La Barbara)

The “translation” aspect, or the “echo” aspect, comes through and is the richness of the text. It’s a variety of “deliberate mis-reading,” but it’s also a means of entering into the phonemic components of the words and improvising off of those sound patterns. When you move from “incredible magical” to “in creed able magic call” you are

## A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

“I study what I write as I study out any mystery. A poem, mine or another’s, is an occult document, a body awaiting vivisection, analysis, X-rays.” — Robert Duncan

“A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader.” — Charles Olson

"I would like to make poems out of real objects. The lemon to be a lemon that the reader could cut or squeeze or taste — a real lemon like a newspaper in a collage is a real newspaper. I would like the moon in my poems to be a real moon, one which could be suddenly covered with a cloud that has nothing to do with the poem — a moon utterly independent of images. The imagination pictures the real. I would like to point to the real, disclose it, to make a poem that has no sound in it but the pointing of a finger." — Jack Spicer

"All poetry is experimental poetry." — Wallace Stevens

"God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, as, for example, the form of high poetry."

— Wallace Stevens

*reached for a piece of tobacco from her shell.* The oranges and blues are not the only things shifting here, attention is shifting, thought itself slipping from the crisp image to the abstract concept, Pound's triad of terms, from phanopoeia to logopoeia by way of mel-opoeia, the music, rhythmic alliterations and quiet assonances, carrying as it must the mind from image to idea.

John High  
THE SASHA POEMS

What I like most about this are all the particulars, the very specific nouns and adjectives, commingled with allusions to Greek gods and elusive references to ethereal "dead ones." *The mushrooms & deep allusions of autumn! These shifting oranges & blues in the mulberry & madrone leaves. Hey Zeus. Everyday I see the birds on the horizon, the dead one went on, chattering as she*

Anabasis  
"LightSide"

"More axially proximal; affirmed man-tern  
lopes these rill to dalles uppered palouse"

Something very strange and wonderful happening in this couplet. These names, dalles and palouse, upper palouse at that, I think I remember, turn into some new amorphous hybrid part of speech, it's really difficult to stop the things and get a grip on what is meant, on what meaning is even possible, somehow there's an underlying sense of geography as process, or of place as inseparable from consciousness, so inevitably incessant flux, which would mean in some sense not really place at all, back maybe to Fenollosa's "no nouns in nature," but I don't think we have the usual conversion of nouns to verbs here, more like nouns to adjectival deictics, this or that particular quality of perceived place. I don't want to suggest any sort of ethereal epiphanic dissolution, I doubt if that is intended or even available from what is on the page, but you manage to get at body meshed with time and altered through the conscious apprehension of this presence, so that a distancing as present process is in evidence — this much is underscored by the following couplet: "Memory's bending line."

A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

"Open to all poetries, I'm shipwrecked amid terms such as 'avant-garde' and 'experimental' — words largely abandoned by many who share my universe of discourse. Most of the positive values inscribed in these terms have been so thoroughly appropriated that they are taken for granted. There is no more need for these self-congratulatory terms." — Jackson Mac Low

"A case can be made out for the poet giving some of his life to the words *the* & *a*: both of which are weighted with as much epos & historical destiny as one man can perhaps resolve. Those who do not believe this are too sure that the little words mean nothing among so many other words." — Louis Zukofsky

"The feeling is that the poem already exists. The effort is to find the sounds, the words and the syntax which will allow the poem to be heard." — George Oppen

"By the brokenness of his composition the poet makes himself master of a certain weapon which he could possess himself of in no other way." — William Carlos Williams

"To be a poet is to know how to leave speech. To let it speak alone, which it can do only in its written form. To leave writing is to be there only in order to provide its passageway, to be the diaphanous element of its going forth: everything and nothing. For the work, the writer is at once

everything and nothing. Like God." — Jacques Derrida

John High  
THE SASHA POEMS

There's a passage in here (*The grass viewing the problem as Dogan quietly appeared across the plain, another behind him dragging a chair & no belongings . . . In this way we let the world in. No matter.*) that is almost a congealed summary of what you are doing in many of these poems, bringing the world inside, bit by bit, one particular at a time, into the inner world where the poem lives, where the word meets its absence and origin in the corporeal myth of spirit. It's a fine, tuned music, return that is never quite repetition, the strength and sense of rhythmic sound.

Anabasis  
FEEL THE POEM 2  
APPROACHING SHEILA

Thanks for sending the piece on Sheila's work. Some of it might apply directly to your own work. I'm thinking of the distinction between empty and full sentences. It's an odd thing, in much of your writing, prose or verse, that there is a fullness, palpable sense of excess, in the words on the page, and they fill you up with something other than what you call content messaging, and the

paradoxical effect is of being emptied, that all this fullness is able to reveal a simultaneous emptiness. This is the center of your writing in some ways, part of what I was trying to get at in the essay on Daily Logs, with all the references to Scholem and the *tsum-tsum* of Lurianic Kabbalah. It doesn't need to come from Kabbalah, obviously, and I don't think that's where it comes from in your writing, but the sense is the same, or very similar, that there is a concurrence of emptiness and fullness that exists as a sort of tension, imaged often as dualisms, body and mind the most primary in this instance, but what is really happening in the writing, what language is able to do, is to present this particular flux, and to force the encounter. You get in to the energy exchange inside the energy transfer, and the unavoidable noise of excessive content is like a lightning storm that you're alive in, as, and this is what we have been taught to read, so the first inclination is to decipher the coded fury of this presence, but the process of that attempt begins to bring the gaps into play, silences between the senses, little empty pockets of charged stillness scattered around the field of knowing, and these set up a sense of balance, probably illusory, actually a dynamic equilibrium, that vibrant tension. . . . I wind up shaking my head and laughing at this, what the hell am I trying to describe, and who am I trying to tell? You've got it in the essay on Sheila, and even more of it in some of the other prose, early articulations of "style as behavior" as in *The One The Same The Other*.

## A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

"The poet is really not much different from that tenor player who gets up in a half-empty, smoke-filled dive at two in the morning to play the millionth rendition of "Body and Soul." Which is to say that one plays with the weight of all that tradition, but also to entertain the customers and to please oneself. One is both bound and free. One improvises but there are constraints, forms to obey. It's the same old thing which is always significantly different." — Charles Simic

"Connections between unconnected things are the unreal reality of Poetry." — Susan Howe

"When I write a poem, I have no idea or I have a very sketchy idea, of what it's going to be about, and it may be just that I have a few phrases or words in mind, or it's some simple idea; and in connecting these things the poetry happens. In fact, the original things that I began with I may decide to cut out of the poem. It's getting from one place to another. You have a few points that you connect up, and the poem seems very much to deal with getting from one place to another, from one moment to another." — John Ashbery

"Once the poem is really there, the poet is dismissed, is no longer privy." — Paul Celan

"There is no natural look or sound to a poem.

Every element is intended, chosen." — Charles Bernstein

## HAECCEITY: Reading "The Condensation Series" (Taz Delaney)

"Language is commonness in being, through which we see and make sense of and value. Its exploration is the exploration of the human common ground, the move from purely descriptive, outward directive, writing toward writing centered on its wordness, its physicality, its haecceity (thisness) is, in its impulse, an investigation of human self-sameness, of the place of our connection: in the world, in the word, in ourselves." — Charles Bernstein

"Is writing simply the way in which that which expresses itself without us, nevertheless expresses itself through what has been handed down to us from our origins and which the word has made us discover?" — Edmond Jabès

. . . and so begin in the current horizon illuminating by mapping unavailable territory outside this fragile spot-as-image marked by X ( equals image of spot) bound by pact for zenith of magic which, having entered, we recognize as the poem in our reading of it: this be/Duplicate this.

. . . as natives of this altertnity,

entered by as into, its spherical viewpoint, towards. Past the typeface mask (persona) of personality, any accounting for boundaries, any index of separations, awareness produces itself as question, previous to text, yet taking form only as these luminous symbols, these seminal fluids.

. . . in spark of sketchy nexus, of ourselves and text, to transform, erase, rip image X, disguises of self and directions of words-as-map, here, in glory and farce of circumstance, spelunking flesh towards vortex, swirl of signals, of blood blur urban fur accord, to the insistence of action, even as reading in this rarified realm.

. . . out of by in to, and stable in the maelstrom of a now, endless instant of 40 years ago (me — more — why?), the mind believes the mind which believes the given being, here, wispy mist vowels, boulder con-sonants, imaginary rooms and fields, fancied Lhasa of psychotropic syllables, by which are being taken and being offered precise measurements of the articulated wilderness.

. . . by hex, sign of the magic pact, evanescing (wavicles) in and out the objective ace, cold hard facsimile up the sleeve, through and towards channels and chords into through and towards the tactile presence of the timeless voice.

. . . witness other life . . . contacts w/contexts.

. . . out of as towards proprioceptive gnosis, muscles of light shards/piercing night slabs, in ancient sacred frenzy of the swirling.

. . . by means of which is acquired the freedom and the warning, the confidence of action, awareness of the layered dangers, between ongoing birth and actual boundary. towards as is: pervasive pleasance of presence.

. . . towards as is. Wave world within imposed mirage. Know. some. thing. Know as nexus here: the war in God/Ubiquitous chromosomal music . . .

“Surely infiniteness is the most evident thing in the world” — George Oppen

“Metonymy: the fragment as substitute for, hinting at, something else, something that only it can stand for, is an instance of — a manifestation or emanation. The part for the (w)holy.” — Charles Bernstein

Amy Trussell / Jim Leftwich  
Untitled Collaboration

“And where did “artichoke” come from, pray tell?”

WORD HISTORY: “Those who have been warned to

watch out for the sharp-tipped bracts toward the innermost part of an artichoke may have wondered whether the name of this vegetable has anything to do with choking. Originally it did not. Our word goes back to an Arabic word for the same plant, *al-harsuf*. The Arabic word passed into Spanish, a not uncommon occurrence given the fact that Moslems ruled much of Spain for several centuries during the Middle Ages. The Old Spanish word *alcarchofa* was variously modified as it passed through Italian, a Northern dialect form being *articiocco*, which looks more like artichoke than *al-harsuf*. In English, where the word is first recorded in the early 16th century, a potpourri of spellings and explanations of it are found. For example, people who did not know the long history of the word explained it by the notion that the flower had a "choke," that is, something that chokes, in its "heart." (from *The American Heritage Dictionary*)

"Error being like the Jerusalem-Artichoake; plant it where you will, it overrunnes the ground and choakes the heart." (from *The New English Dictionary*, 1884, quoted in Weekley's *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*)

The "Jerusalem" in this comes, by way of folk etymology, from the Italian, *girasóle*, a name for the sunflower which means "turning towards the sun." The artichoke is a member of this species.

"Artichoke" is a word which has been read, and heard, associationally throughout its history. In his

book on puns, Walter Redfern quotes John Orr: "Even a wrong etymology is a sound and sense association, and therefore a linguistic fact." With "artichoke," the sense of "heart" and "choke" seems to go back a ways, as part of the association, homonymic constellation of connotations surrounding the word. The experience is similar to what Bob Grumman calls the infraverbal, where meanings from two or more words are compressed into a single neologism (as in the one I created the other night through mis-typing: Thingks — so this is what Williams was talking about with his "no ideas but in things"). "Artichoke" becomes "heart" and "choke" through the application of a pun, for "heart," and through a kind of fission into a portmanteau word, as if it had been constructed of "heart" and "choke." This leaves the "i" to be read as a pronoun. "Heart I choke," as corny out of context as any other pun. In context, however, it might become: "earthworm / electric / ear, artifice / of / artichoke." The conjunction of "ear and "artifice" provides the necessary clue as to how this might be read. What is it about? Perhaps it is about writing with the intention of being misread, mis-heard. Redfern fore-grounds the humorous aspects of this punning quality of language: "Transgression, overlap, approximation. The last named is built into the Greek word paronomasia (naming alongside, providing near-relative to). One near- relative to paronomasia, coincidentally, is the rare word paronomesis, which means illegality. Paragram is the term for a play on words involving the alteration of one or more letters —

one of the commonest forms of punning. Hughes and Hammond use the term 'assonant pun' for this variety (as in 'there's a vas deferens between children and no children').” P. Valesio, quoted in Redfern, evokes some of the darker implications of the kind of deliberate misreading or mis-hearing which occurs in verbal folklore: “Incest is felt as a threat, because it shatters the equilibrium of kinship systems by obscuring the distinction between permissible and non-permissible mates; in an analogous way, verbal folklore, as realized in figures of speech, is felt as a threat, because it shatters the formal equilibrium of language by obscuring the relationship between related and unrelated words; more specifically by relating words above and beyond the framework of etymological kinships and grammatical paradigms. In both threats lurks the danger of madness.” Steve McCaffery focuses on the paragraph (as in , approximately, heart/art, or ear/hear) as a destabilizing agent within language: “The percolation of the word through the paragraph contaminates the notion of an ideal, unitary meaning and thereby counters the supposition that words can ‘fix’ or stabilize in closure.” These linguistic possibilities alter the durational aspects of reading by problematizing the linear flow of meaning, insisting instead on pauses where meaning pools, layers, refracts and ripples. Reading becomes the active invention-as-discovery of meaning, and meaning becomes a clustered, constellated site of shifting meanings, the site of consciousness culling meanings from the sensory data. Denotation

becomes but one opportunity among the many other associational options. Reading is opened to the adventure of misreading, an avenue out of the imposed constraints of normative interpretation. The practice of deliberate misreading comes to the forefront, if not of poetry itself then at least of poetry criticism, in Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*: “Poetry is the anxiety of influence, is misprision, is a disciplined perverseness. Poetry is misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misalliance.” For Bloom, the contemporary strong poet writes as a process of revision in direct relation to a precursor poem or poet. Whether we accept this tenet or not, Bloom’s theory of writing as a process of misreading can be generative, useful: “Poetic Influence — when it involves two strong, authentic poets — always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.” The question, here, is whether or not this tendency towards misreading might be extended to include other areas of influence as well. Barthes writes of influence as being more properly considered as currency, not a linear progression of cause and effect but a field in which we move, work and play. Jerome Rothenberg, in one of his commentaries appended to *Technicians of the Sacred*, writes of a process which he terms

“sacralism:” “What’s happened, simply, is that something has been sighted & stated & set apart (by name or by description); given its own tune, too, to make it special; fixed, held fast in all this vanishing experience. It is this double sense of sighted/sited that represents the basic poetic function (a setting-apart-by-the-creation-of-special-circumstances that the editor calls ‘sacralism’) from which the rest follows — toward the building of more complicated structures & visions.” The particulars of any place, seen in this light, are the sacred elements of that place, and the poem doesn’t create or cause that sacredness, it evokes it — by drawing our attention to the site, and by insisting that a special kind of attention be brought (Hans Jonas insists, in his book on gnosticism, that “gnosis is of the particular”). But the meanings of these sightings/sitings coalesce and resonate not in the writing so much as in the reading, not so much in the time spent by an author writing as in the time spent, later, by a reader, reading. As Barthes puts it: “A text consists of multiple writings proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation; but there is a site where the multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader; the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made; the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal; the reader is a man without history, without biography, without

psychology; he is only that someone who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted.” If this is the case, and it does certainly appear to be the case, then the writer’s function is to construct an open text, to enter into a set larger than that which he composes (to paraphrase John Cage), to assemble and order a field of experience for a future (unknown and unknowable) reader. Bloom offers the concept of the *clinamen*, the *swerve*, as an invitation to radically alter the field of practical criticism in relation to poetry: “Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to ‘understand’ any single poem as an entity in itself. Let us pursue instead the quest of learning to read any poem as its poet’s deliberate misinterpretation, *as a poet*, of a precursor poem or of poetry in general.” I would emphasize “poetry in general” in this injunction. Deliberately mis-reading poetry in general is a project that might interest us — as well as its logical extension, which would be the deliberate poetical misreading of life in general, by means of a deliberate misreading of life in all of its particulars. The appropriate reading will have been defined by social, cultural and historical powers; the deliberate misreading will occur in this context as resistance, defiance, a project empowered by processes moving towards liberation. I am proposing a practice which begins with something very much like Wallace Stevens’s sobering pronouncement: “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a

fiction and that you believe in it willingly." I take this exquisite truth as a point of departure. We might find ourselves working, through poetry, to consciously, intentionally, transform our belief-systems, to insist on openness where the system would impose closure, to write as a refusal of constructed boundaries. John Lilly, much maligned, discredited though only by his daring in a community which doesn't value such a maverick embrace of risk as his, has confronted this subject as direct experience: "'My own beliefs are unbelievable', says a new metabelief. In the province of the mind, what is believed to be true is true or becomes true, within limits to be found experientially and experimentally. These limits are further beliefs to be transcended. In the province of the mind, there are no limits." Elliot Weinberger seems to echo this: "The only belief that is salutary for poetry is the belief in poetry, which is never simple, and even less simple to maintain." We might wind up believing in the work, in the process and the procedures, in the special quality of attention which is required — but the work destabilizes our beliefs. The work, finally, isn't about truth, or ethics, it is about attending to being in the world, and opening to all which that entails. Stevens: "In the long run the truth does not matter." Again: "Ethics are no more a part of poetry than they are of painting." Poetry can offer experiences which might baffle the mind, or cleave the brain with anguish, but the kind of poetry I am imagining does not close us to the encounter with our lives. It opens us to a larger reality, by open-

ing new particulars into the arena of experiential reality. Poetry brings us to those experiences which do not choke the heart.

#### A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

"I don't know how to make poems. I don't consider my-self a poet and I don't particularly locate poetry in poems, nor am I the first to say it. Poetry — as transport, invention, or music — is always an imponderable that can be found in any genre, a sudden widening of the World. It is a gift of nature, a grace, not a piece of labor. The very ambition to make a poem is enough to kill it." — Henri Michaux

"The idea of getting all the material in a poem totally 'spontaneously' from my 'self' seems boring to me — my interest in writing is to be able to incorporate material from disparate places. . . . I think the whole persona conceit capitalizes on a sense of 'finding a voice' which to me is finding altogether too much too fast, and getting stuck with it. I'm not that interested in myself — in recounting facts and observations about that; though how the self gets formulated as an article of socialization seems to me insufficiently explored." — Charles Bernstein

"The poem-painting as a kind of advertising poster — here is the analogy at the heart of Marinetti's *parole in liberta*, the words-in-freedom arranged

artfully on the page in different sizes, typefaces, and colors.” — Marjorie Perloff

“The basic reason I write, I believe, is not to ‘write poetry’ or ‘be a poet,’ but it is because poetry is for me the best means to approach another end. That end is greater understanding and knowledge, and a greater sense of balance and meaning in what is and in what I experience. There is no ‘end’ to this ‘goal’ of course; it is the process that counts, the movement toward what cannot exist. The development of my process has been toward less and less direct intervention of my social or conscious ego in what I write, a motion toward a greater ‘blankness’ of self and expression.” — John M. Bennett

“I often think that the reason I write poetry is because I have a need for a certain kind of poetry to read, a kind no one else has ever written.” — John M. Bennett

John High  
THE SASHA POEMS

*Even the so-called ordained will find it difficult though, Ezekiel sighed. Yet you will not relent? No, there is bread on the table, the second monk replied. There may be wine! shouted the third as he stumbled in the blue & found its wetness singing.*

Text reflecting on itself, reflecting on other writings, but drawn from the experience of the world. The narrative framework is a high form of trickery, it draws the reader in — I am going to “hear” a story! this is familiar turf — but it’s a ruse of the writing, there is no story, there is a further falling of the fragments of that which has fallen apart, the old tales of continuity and unity, the old dream of the Whole mirrored in and measured by the meetings in music of man. This is the new story, the story of the story, the metanarrative, as they say, and it is in its late stages: vectors of light refracted among the shards. The downhill slide, denouement, through millennial hope. The particulars form not a pattern but the ideal of a pattern, perhaps the memory of a pattern, palimpsest — huthatch and earwig, porcupine and pigeon, reminders of what it might once have meant to be enmeshed in nature, back in the earlier chapters of the book of the story, when its fiction was a simpler challenge, when belief wasn’t constructed from and within a tangle of discarded beliefs. A deeply infused sorrow has become the thread which binds all this together. Glimpses of joy bloom in a larger field of sorrow. Millennial gloom. Being in the world. We go on, making our provisional myths, a daily task.

Jake Berry  
BRAMBU DREZI

I just listened to your reading from Brambu again, the tape from last April. There is a moment there when you reach one of the glossolalic passages, and the rapid-fire delivery produces a sort of turbulent music, completely asemic, which can only be an instance of you working with the breath of the vowels in and against the consonants. It is like an abstract expressionist painting realized in sound, is deeply like that, the experience of that, where the “abstract” is an inappropriate word, nothing more concrete than this presence in the sensorium, and the “expressionistic” is equally inappropriate, for this is anything but conventional expressivity, it’s an entrance into and an opening of the origins of words and meanings, sounds coalesced in the cycle of breathing around the play of the tongue, previous to what we have come to call meaning, certainly previous to denotation. What occurs, though, is a resonant presence of humanness, human ut-terance stripped of the vertical noise of etymology and the horizontal cacophony of connotation, so we are allowed to encounter the human music, and to hear the meanings in that sense, as when listening to Coltrane, for example, where the sounds of the horn don’t extend across a distance to their significations, but exist as complex un-ities, carrying the weight of meaning but without the gulf of interpretive mentation. This is where the practices which you describe inevitably lead, through the letters to the body, and through the body to a primal encounter with the human ability to produce significant

sounds. Part of what you are working with and against is the excess of meaning which characterizes our age, meanings vast in-cessant and omnipresent which crowd out and silence the primacy of experience. This is what Abulafia has in mind as part of the process of *zerufe otiot*, combining and re-combining the letters until they are stripped of their myriad meanings: “When you wish to recite the Name of seventy-two letters you must arrange to be alone in a special place, to pronounce the secret of the Ineffable Name, and to separate and isolate yourself from every speaking creature, and from all vanities [of the world, so as not to view them as] attributes [of God]. And also so that there not remain in your heart any thoughts of human or natural things, of either voluntary or necessary [matters], as if you are one who has given a writ of divorce to all forms of the mundane world, as one who has given a testament in the presence of witnesses in which he orders [another] to take care of his wife and his children and his property, and has relieved himself of all involvement and supervision and transferred it from himself and gone away.” But this is only a part of the process, a beginning. The fragments and shards of language, asemic aggregates of letters, alphabetical sound glyphs, are nonetheless still aspects of language, still the raw components of words, and once dismantled they begin almost immediately to recombine as glimpses and intimations of words, new channels of meaning open in the fissured array of familiar glyphs, but the new constellated meanings arrive as if unbid-

den, revelations available only to a state of receptivity, the lucid theta state entrained by the discipline of the work. Abulafia again: “And begin by combining this name, namely, YHWH, at the beginning alone, and examine all its combinations and move it and turn it about like a wheel returning around, front and back, like a scroll, and do not let it rest, but when you see its matter strengthened because of the great motion, because of the fear of confusion of your imagination and the rolling about of your thoughts, and when you let it rest, return to it and ask [it] until there shall come to your hand a word of wisdom from it, do not abandon it. Afterwards go on to the second one from it, Adonay, and ask of it its foundation [yesodo] and it will reveal to you its secret [sodo]. And then you will apprehend its matter in the truth of its language. Then join and combine the two of them [YHWH and Adonay], and study them and ask them, and they will reveal to you the secrets of wisdom, and afterwards combine this which is, namely, El Sadday, which is tantamount to the Name [El Sadday = 345 = ha-Sem], and it will also come in your portion. Afterwards combine Elohim, and it will also grant you wisdom, and then combine the four of them, and find the miracles of the Perfect One [i.e., God], which are miracles of wisdom.” Abulafia offers a practice designed to force the writer to engage in writing as a spiritual discipline. As you say, “Maybe the greatest revelation from Abulafia is that he verifies our own instincts as ecstasies. He writes like a man possessed and his techniques

are not fearful but more like Baudelaire’s drunkenness, be drunk with something, and yet he did not lose his mind, but was revitalized by the process. Certainly a model. Because he is an open form.” In some ways it really doesn’t seem to matter what the process is, what the specific details of the ritual are, (I think of Jasper Johns’ instructions for artists: “Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it.”) what matters is the kind of attention one brings to the work, which Idel discusses in all those wonderful Hebrew words, hitebodedut, as seclusion and concentration, hishtawwut as equanimity, as the Greek apahteia, equanimity of the soul as a goal in itself — both of which refer, I suspect, to the receptive lucid theta state —, towards hamshakhat, drawing down (of thought), to, finally, the unio mystica. Abulafia seems to have attained this gnosis in 1280, when he was 40. The process of letter-combination, practiced as a spiritual discipline, is offered as a path by which one might attain this realization, and the magick of the process is presented as being the actual transformation of consciousness which occurs in doing the work. Thus Idel: “This technique of breaking-down or atomizing the Name is the most distinctive characteristic of Abulafia’s technique; the Holy Name contains within itself ‘scientific’ readings of the structure of the world and its activities, thereby possessing both an ‘informative’ character and magical powers. It is reasonable to assume that both qualities are associated with the peculiar structure of the Name. However, in Abulafia’s view this structure

must be destroyed in order to exploit the ‘prophetic’ potential of these Names and to create a series of new structures by means of letter-combinations. In the course of the changes taking place in the structure of the Name, the structure of human consciousness likewise changes. As Abulafia indicated in a number of places, the Divine Name is inscribed upon man’s soul, making it reasonable to assume that the process of letter-combinations worked upon the Name is understood as occurring simultaneously in the human soul.” There is some evidence from the laboratories of science to indicate that the letters, or a sort of sketched blueprint of the letters, are inscribed on the human psyche. Nigel Pennick makes reference to this in his book on Magical alphabets: “Historically, it was from the Phoenician script that Greek originated. But modern research on human perception may provide us with an-other possibility, one embedded deeply within our own human consciousness. Modern neurophysiology has identified phosphenes, geometrical shapes and images that are present subconsciously in the visual cortex and neural system. These are present in all humans: they are described as entopic, being visible when the eyes are shut. They can also be seen when the consciousness is altered by some means: during meditation, in trance, or in hallucinations induced by fatigue, illness, or drugs. Geometric shapes related to letters are often perceived in the early stages of trance.” Abulafia opens us into a vast field of practice. This kind of thinking, and the practice which it proposes, might lead us back to

the origins of the lyric, and beyond. I think it’s THE project for us to work on as poets at the end of this millennium. I think you’re already in the middle of this work.

#### A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

“Poetry and its associated Poetics is about what one has to do in various states of attending in order to advance, in order to grow and achieve self, or whatever lies out there for you.” — Thomas Lowe Taylor

“Poetry is not another shorthand for spiritual information, nor a realm of special effects which tickles the ends of the brainstem.” — Thomas Lowe Taylor  
“A poet is an individual poetic entity biologically appearing. It speaks, it bodies forth being, participates in the theater of objects. What might be the essential nature of such a pansubstantial creature can only be discovered through direct confrontation and mutual dissolution within the shared domain, the antipersonal dynamic this union cultivates.” — Jake Berry

“The form a poem assumes is no longer a concern. The form of a word is the arena.” — Mike Basinski

“Abstract poetry evaluates values against values. One might even say ‘Words against Words’. This does not produce sense, but generates a cosmic

feeling." — Kurt Schwitters

Steve Fried  
"Nor's INRI"

These new poems are excellent. The use of the alternating consonances, as you aptly call them, within a narrative context is astonishing. This is post-language poetry — thematically, stylistically, philosophically. Ken Harris and I were talking a few months ago about the possibilities of incorporating narrative and characterization into a poetry which takes the letter as the unit of composition (however this manifests or is disguised). The music here subverts the narrative in interesting ways (the appearance of paragrams and other intraverbal mutations within the vectored rhyme-scheme diverts the reader's attention to units of meaning much smaller than that of the narrative, or of the sentence, even of the word — each point on the crossed vectors becomes a compressed polysemy — this interrupts the smooth rhythmic production of meaning, disrupting the narrative sequence — one's eye moves along the vectors, up and down, left to right and right to left, meanings coalesce in a paratextual or peritextual spiral — but the thread is clearly delineated, so one returns to the sequential reading of the narrative, though the flow is swollen and slowed — there is a narrative here, and it is clearly conveyed, but it carries with it almost as a pal-

impsest the resonant complexities created by the intricacies of its formal construction).

Steve Fried / Steve Fagan  
"Red Eva Rediviva"

The revised Red Eva arrived, very nicely done. Part of the difficulty in doing this sort of thing is deciding that it's ok to relinquish some of the textual continuity, some of the finished unity of the text, towards the creation of a symbiotic or synergistic conflation of text and image. Passages of the text are obscured or occluded by the image, but this actually serves to enrich the reading, brings the play of a polysemous, associative possibility to the reading. Lines which originally appeared (perhaps deceptively) to co-here, a syntax discernible if not an immediate sense, become fragmented, and sections are read in apposition. This opens the reading strategy to a possibility of dispensing with the left-to-right, top-to-bottom pathway, so new resonances occur or appear, connections suggested by phonemic patterns, for example. This is the kind of thing I enjoy most in the visual poetries.

John M. Bennett  
selection of poems from March, 1995:

Beowulf:  
Hwaet, we gar-dena in geardagum  
("Yes, we of the Spear-Danes, in former days")

(“What we garden / ah in year-day  
home”

—Zukofsky: phonetic transliteration)

Sensical transliteration: “compression of material into lyric molds”

Anti-sensical transliteration: stretching the limits of etymological credulity

(adapted from Michele Leggot, READING 80 FLOWERS)

I'm looking at the package you just sent, finding all sorts of evidence of the methods Leggot discusses in relation to Zukofsky: transliteration, words which perform as multiple parts of speech, the ambiguous apostrophe s. This last is one of the trademarks of your work, and does a number of things for me: 1) it makes us consider the plural along with the possessive; 2) it makes us consider the contracted “\_\_ is” along with the possessive and the plural; 3) it encourages us to look elsewhere for words forming across the space between them (elisions, synaloepha, metathesis, any number of other polysemous permutations). Some interesting thoughts come to mind: what does it mean to have to consider the possessive and the plural simultaneously? and then to have to consider the contraction of the singular verb to be? to have these possible meaning oscillating before us on the page? I suspect that it's the gist of what you're telling us. Maybe something like consciousness as

a phase transition, turbulent volume of the moment. An immense, condensed philosophical approach, maybe a little zen-like (a blanksmanship?). I don't know. But I like how it all works, and like working with it all. There's a point in Leggot's book where she is discussing one of the 80 Flowers poems and following a trail of etymologies and multi-lingual homonyms, recording the branching tangents as they occur for her, and she ends by saying that “these are the kinds of connections Zukofsky welcomed whether they were made before or after the art of composition.” That's what openness is, I think, what openness is about, why it's important. The idea is that a poem can increase the range of possibilities available in any given moment, and encourage us to range across those possibilities, motivated by something like the joy of inclusion. And then we can take that kind of thinking to the streets.

#### A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

“Ethnopoetics — my coinage, in a fairly obvious way, circa 1967 — refers to an attempt to investigate on a transcultural scale the range of possible poetries that had not only been imagined but put into practice by other human beings. It was premised on the perception that western definitions of poetry & art were no longer, indeed had never been, sufficient & that our continued reliance on them was distorting our view both of the larger human experience & of our own possi-

bilities within it." — Jerome Rothenberg

"The first study for a man who wants to be a poet is the knowledge of himself, entire." — Arthur Rimbaud

"I have never been able to stand someone fiddling with the lines of a great poet from a semantical, historical, archeological or mythological viewpoint — lines of poetry are not explained." — Antonin Artaud

"I feel that I write about the basic intimacies of life itself. Only, I'm locating those intimacies upon a field in which the signature of personal identity — of so much individual attitude and posturing — is held to a strict minimum, if not eliminated altogether. There's little room in my poetry, I find, for myself." — Gustaf Sobin

"I see poetry as some kind of talking which is some kind of thinking." — David Antin

John M. Bennett

EDDY; SPINAL SPEECH; JUST FEET

One of the things that gets my attention with EDDY is all the amazing little phrases scattered throughout: "thorn piano," "funneled sock glue," "protrusion room adder," "where a sparrow fidgit's aura's rain," — they're all over the place — "stasis

dirt," "flat womb gristle." This is the surrealism, or ur-realism, in your your work, but foregrounded in these poems, pervasive. This is not al-ways the case. In SPINAL SPEECH, for example, the title poem, the closest thing you have is "spurtings into fluor-escence air," which really isn't the same at all, it's almost a sort of conventionally surrealist (odd thought) image. But the poem works because of the layers created by mangled syntax, fragmented rhythms, radical disjunction — not because of the images ("river of stones" is another — though river of stones might almost be a comment on just how this particular text *flows*, these rhythms that we recognize in breaths are made of *nouns*, nothing airy about them.) There is, in the new poems, as you say, "a constant cycling (or spiraling) back to a somewhat different combination of 'random words' (in appearance) & discursive phrases," in "brush," for example, where "painted," "protrusion," "leak" and "already"/"ready" end and begin stanzas, end and begin phrases, and also nestle in the midst of odd repetitive phrases enjambed across stanzaic breaks — as in "your leak protrusion leak intendant," etc. or "stone painted painted scrim." The effect is of a spiraling, strands of thought in a spiral weave. You have to stop, reading these lines, and negotiate a number of possible readings that are occurring simultaneously — "all is gum stone painted," "stone painted painted scrim," "painted scrim insertion," etc, the lines torque into re-combinant statements, but the statements themselves are virtually indecipherable, it is their coiling about

themselves, the dynamic woven density of possible interpretations, that is the real statement. Beyond that, the message is one of physically struggling to decode all the simultaneously received encryptions, fragments of slippery utterance, as if reading might be flexing the muscles of one's brain, an isometric agon of the axons, wrestling with these signals coming through the synapses. Lots of static, lots of noise, but present in such a way as to be enjoyable to engage. This is exactly the situation one encounters trying to decipher the calligraphic poems as well — “from’s late dreamed thunder,” “reamed thunder,” “formulate creamed thunder.” This stuff is fun! I saw somewhere recently a note that called you a language poet, no qualifiers, no disclaimers, just “John Bennett, the language poet.” There are lots of reasons why this isn’t particularly accurate, but some of what you accomplish, by different means, is exactly what some of the language writers have proposed in their poetics. The main difference, and it’s an important one, is that you manage to keep the human being fully present and felt in the process of the poem and in its “content.” Jake is right on target in his “approach” to your JUST FEET: “Bennett is altering what poetry is, enhancing our awareness of the ‘cosmological body,’ singing a song that sweeps through the mind like plasma in the veins.” It’s the somatic presence in these poems, both as references to parts of the human body and as words on the page — the strings of mutating nouns in EDDY, for example — that really makes them work, that connects with

the rhythms of the body, the polyrhythms of the body, breath and blood and neural wiring. And that’s only a piece of the action. Some of it remains pure mystery.

#### A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

“Poetry excludes calculation and premeditation: it is in-completion, foreboding, abyss. Neither a singsong geom-etry, nor a succession of bloodless adjectives. We are too deeply wounded and too despondent, too weary and too barbarous in our weariness, to appreciate, yet, the craft.” — E. M. Cioran

“Power of poetry: to employ propositional language not to make assertions, but to make, for a moment, lush gardens where one is free from assertions, exalted in the fragrance of presentness.

Such deconditioned delights, subtle, struggling free from associations yet enduring with pleasure all the temporary ecstasies of them as they slip off, may indeed give the reader of contemporary poetry a taste for such unconditions, dis-situation. And you may wind up trying to live free of the obligation of attending to your own habitual intentions.” — Robert Kelly

“If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know it is poetry. If I feel

physically as if the top of my head were taken off,  
I know this is poetry." — Emily Dickenson

Chris Daniels  
"april 1970 not even shadow"

"Shatter this diorite/sun" is a tightly woven trope, diorite being a kind of crystal, the word from Greek *dia-* + *horizein*, to divide, limit. "Obsidian shard" suggests fragments of a black sun, "deeper than time." "Chitin petals" imagines a hybrid of insect and flower, another form of dissolution. "Delphic fulgination" continues the blurring of boundaries, smoky, black, therefore obscure, as the in-*itations* of an oracle, black smoke rising off the offering. Predictions concerning ultimate questions remain shrouded in such smoke: death of the poet . . . death of the world . . . union in dissolution . . . uncertain suggestions of at-one-ment.

The diction borrows heavily from Celan's writings. The hyphenated constructions ("shell-/almond-counting/ shyly-on-the-compass-rose" in Daniels; an example from Celan: "red- / ember-mighty / alembic"), or the ambiguous construction "meat- / well," which recalls such neologisms as "wellchants" in Celan, the various stones (Joris: "the word is nothing solid, diorite or opaque, but a formation with its own internal complexities and crevasses — closer to a geode, to extend the petrological imagery so predominant in the work from BREATHTURN on."), the rose (from

Celan's "Psalm: " "A nothing / we were, are, shall / remain, flowering: / the nothing—, the / no one's rose" — and from Joris: "The rose, flower image / metaphor is a central concept throughout much of Celan's work . . . It becomes rarer in the later volumes and appears only three times . . . from BREATHTURN on. The present composite, 'Kluftrose,' seems most likely to derive from 'Windrose' or compass rose."), all of this suggests a writing not so much about Celan as during Celan, a writing born directly from a reading.

Celan died by drowning in the Seine ("river of nets"!) in April of 1970.

We're left with the poem itself as a sort of "delphic fulgination," but that is perhaps appropriate for a meditation on the suicide of a philosophical poet. The poem invites us to return to Celan, certainly a success for a poem that is at least in part an homage.

#### A GATHERING OF FRAMES:

"Poetry is language practicing itself." — Jerome McGann

"Impossible to write a kind of poetry in which the unconscious aim is to create (reveal) a code that almost can't be cracked (analogue to the enigmatic nature of reality itself) and to also have the pleasure of seeing almost every aspect be constantly governable. In this sense my approach to

writing (and the one I seem to most often enjoy in the writing of others) contains an important anarchic aspect, a ‘jungle’ or ‘jumble’ or ‘mumbo-jumbo’ that permits things to thrive together unnoticed, or could utter involuntarily from its throat a garbled kind of truth — garbled necessarily because of the resistances which arise in the uncovering of any mystery. This truth is not a deduction, reduction or introduction — it is the description of life which has the smell of life — a most venerable scratch ‘n sniff. But the same element which creates this palpably funky aspect also threatens to cause to be said that which seemed unspeakable in any other way.” — Nick Piombino

“This is the one social function of poetry (and art in general) that I am certain about: it helps keep the synapses functioning, the mind’s arteries from hardening, in writers and readers alike. So rather than legislators I would call poets (and readers) something like the unacknowledged life maintenance crew of the mind.” — Rosmarie Waldrop

“The central principle of any poetics is that it ought to result in poetry.” — John Taggart

“At a certain point you decide to start with what’s in front of you. There’s no point despairing of a subject, or carrying on some misguided search for a ‘great’ theme when all you have to do is start with what’s in front of you: the blue lines, the ink, the pen, the letters the pen shapes, the words the letters make, the table, the window, those leafless

trees, these leaves in this notebook in front of me, you — the stuff of poetry.” — bpNichol

Framed as I study the arrival of doubt in the vivid sections of the setting, inferred from the poem itself or a taste of doubt which resides in the reasons for a poem, like the moon hung in a hinge of clouds, imagination circling the native metaphors of the poem. Events walled in a sleeve of howls traverse the opening exits as if a given, this composite possession marked by iteration and use in a way no other interpretation allows, aloof and trained to a minced indifference, tooled to the native said, in that one changes the place of fever to a pleasure in formal constraints, different enough to mull the material as an interest in written work. Selves coded together in recursive dilations as the stern art of an animist tradition. Thinks in a poetic tease that silence quells the written modes. Averse to the pertinent word and in no colors I believe, which means to appropriate from the theater of doubt no end to telling silence, valued tastes by breath again to reproduce the sense, by now a preference for derangement to halt the carnage. In a faculty of scale by cultural definitions into practice, continued to furl the reverence of our overt, unwanted haunts, sung from any corner of the illegitimate humanities, the relation of will to the comedy of being. The poet is a jealous association cauterized by thesis through various human assumptions and constituted by the

tenets of premature intuitions, neither poetry nor its successive correspondence too woven to suborn the em-ployed em to rash propositional gardens, subtle struggles within the secret ecstasies as such, a taste for obligation and the heated mysteries of love. A description of unsaid lifts which function as elements of the same, more defunct singing than the maintenance of a circular legislation. A hearing of fish or fires in the waves of what I write, as if the body awakens to a carom of transduced energy, by way of doubt through parenthetical reasons to squeeze the gamut of paper thus masking the I wound limpid covertly in the poem, covered with a trident of imaginal closure to mask the cancer of its experiment, as a symbol for the eye of poetry, or as a threat to know. The life of proleptic steeples beckons from a glove of whispers, the coiled glint of a living exegesis, canescent dread of nets torqued to think in mantic likenesses, kindness of the messianic grave in the portals of the poem, bent to the real in knotted smoke divined by a fullness grail. Certain, which is to say the usage of the custom, but there are significant differences in the substrates of the ideas. To make a poem begetting an aura of all springs to my mind a melange of traces, I think in terrestrial fire to hinge me to a formula of my self, the harshness begets an archaic rhetoric in the shamanic *techné*, mired in Socratic epics of diurnal spectacle. To paint the poem in literal parole as a seizure of the typefaces. I write the forms of a bestial knowledge therefore poetical reason, the relict poetry which evaluates this does not

preclude an arrangement of urgent doubts in the clearings of the shadow. Poetics is a mythic coin which mitigates the transient imagination, but this sufficiently western thorn of human experience, as image and cant of the knotted spirit, realigns the study of rims with the bones of magic, an image of remotely legitimate distance, pure as the integer, a revenant of the im-age. The doubt of the new is an excess of reasonable peoples, the expression of silence vast treason and a pun, serial meaning which returns to the calculated landscape of exclusion, the song a geometry sings as dread to the despondent craft of bets. To exhume the poetry of fevers for a moment, the luminous point of a ludic presence present to conditional delays in temporal fullness, to live free of thought in the belly of contemporary poetry.

## IN BRAMBU DREZI

Crowley: "Our method is science, our aim is religion."

*Where investigation breaks down before the force of receptivity. At some point, the individual search becomes as banal as anything else, and it is embrace, openness, that matters, that is transcendental, that is at home here.*

Poetry as an alchemical art. "seed rattling in stained glass jar / shelved between salt and sulphur" ("In the *Tria Prima*, sulphur appears as masculine and solar, salt as feminine and lunar, and mercury is ambivalent and hermaphrodite: salt thus appears not as a substance, but as a cosmic principle in alchemy." THE DICTIONARY OF ALCHEMY) (In BRAMBU DREZI, cosmic principles are likely to appear on the shelves of your kitchen cabinet. Every particular opens to the infinite. Each moment is an entrance into the beyond. The details of the world, the objects encountered every day, that can be held in the palm of the hand, textures known against the skin, bloom in the clear light of the wholly other. The body discovers its absence in each palpable encounter. Language resonates in a void. The histories of meanings collapse into themselves. Reference has no sight, no beginning and no end. The poet returns to the origins of language, syllables which signify their sounds, writing a ritual of recording the sacred sound-glyphs. Each mark is a cosmogony.) ("Altogether, sulphur is one of the innumerable synonyms for the *prima materia* in its dual aspects, i.e., as both the initial material and

the end-product." Jung)

"& in vast bleak sectors of stamens howling / radio waves disperse pandemic / seed rattling in stained glass jar / shelved between salt and sulphur"

"From the very beginning of the act of writing, the poet is struggling to redeem, by some magic, the natural opacity of and impurity of language. The first black mark on the white page is a movement away from that vision which constitutes the poet's essential 'letter to the world'. From that initial admission of failure — failure insofar as he has not been able to utter the perfect *Verbe* — the poet must go on to spin out of himself some pattern of sound, image and rhythm, some analogy which will serve as the objective emblem of his subjective conviction. He must embody the truth that he cannot rationally 'explain'. But how? Any technique that will serve this transcendent end of art is admissible. Mallarmé's concern is not, simply, com-munication, but a certain kind of communication, the communication of an ineffable, uniquely, and supremely meaningful quality of a subjective experience. If he turns to what others consider inexcusable obscurity of expression, it is because that is exactly what is required by the nature of his vision." (Thomas A. Williams, MALLARMÉ AND THE LANGUAGE OF MYSTICISM)

Transformation through revelation. What is received turns the world into luminous pulse, and erases the world. At-one-ment as annihilation. Magic if you want it (ashé). ("We know him only / by his footprints in stone, / a basin of pain and knowledge / and beyond that / ashé") (In the ceremonies of

Santeria, ashé is the name of the magical powers invoked by the priest or priestess at the beginning of the ritual which culminates when an initiate is possessed by the spirit. "The possessed individual falls on the floor. Voice, mannerisms, and gestures change completely. The personality of the Orisha has taken over the believer's body." SANTERIA, Nunez

The kabbalistic "Tree of Life" is a means of imaging connectivity, so that you carry it as an actuality within your sensorium, and posit it as a point of departure for your thinking. ("Things don't connect; they correspond." — Jack Spicer) BRAMBU DREZI functions as this sort of mandala, the sacred shape, or site, a topocosm, an open field. The reader enters and is awakened to a process of initiatory transformation. Reading becomes a ritual, but it is a ritual of openness, of radical embrace.

Like a vast elaborated coding of the signal. The correspondences are the key, deeper and more mysterious than we are able to imagine. Towards a revival of pulse as source, the blossom and the blood, and a receptivity to the entire range of the human. BRAMBU DREZI is an ocean blown through the bones, an ancient and dangerous magical energy, a force enormous and immediately overwhelming, so that one works *under* it, or it works out of one's belly, uncoiling up through the brain. It's astonishing that this ever gets to the *written* page. But we have it, a luminous and chthonic gift, and it peels the skin from the eyes and rattles the vertebrae of the spine.

"wires grew from the stone, / heart, and moth wet bursa / in neptune's orbit /

whose storms we swam / electrode tongue tied, drunk on / viscous infant / sacs of messiah / fused into raw metal code"

It is the mystery of poetical being burned into the page. And the harsh dark visual compliments insist upon the balance, or the dynamic equilibrium, of the dark luminosity or luminous darkness. Without the darkness, the vision is in danger of the new age sort of wonderful happy magic of life, which is something in itself, but which is not by any means the entire picture. BRAMBU DREZI is the entire picture of this particular territory, a chthonic light, the relumed cathedral of blood. ("The literary and the visual are the same thing applied two different ways due to the neurosis of categorization. They constitute elements of consensus reality & are co-conspirators in its control. Should we remove the categories each naturally participates in the experience of the other." — response to the CORE questionnaire on visual poetry, 1993) It announces, on every page, a renewed possibility for the poetic, a beacon and a challenge for everyone currently involved in the creative process. It is the great project of spiritual liberation, a space to sing refusals of controls and limits, rejections of restraint, categorization, and commodification, defiance of conquerors, praises of free expression, announcements of awakenings, liberations, transformations, those bardic tendencies which are crystallized presentations of vision, of a chthonic engagement with spirit, a proprioceptive gnosis, a somatic apprehension of world in which the range of experiential possibilities is enlarged, and in which polycultural and polychronic myths, from the

Orphic to the genetic, charged by the uncoiling serpentine, are layered so as to enhance perception of each particular within the mix, gestalt mesh of “memory’s wheeling translucence”.

*where deep means having many layers, and each layer is another surface* “creating a / ripple effect that will eventually violate the / vacuum to such an extent that / condensation forms, encouraging bacterial / infection on the surface”

*it is not the depth, but the beyond, that informs us.*  
*I recline in this noble hell*

**I can**

**see that horned**

*and pretend an appearance* **little fuck**  
**now,**

*allows bodies to writhe in warm metal air* **roaring**  
**with laughter**

“we have formed a compact with discord”

“Mallarmé’s first rule in the poetic of the ineffable is simply this: that suggestion works better than explanation. The reason is easy to see. Explanation operates on the level of the intellect, and is discursive; it leads at best to philosophy. Suggestion, on the other hand, bypasses the intellectual ‘reducing valve’. It does not relate an idea to the reader, but engenders an experience within him. Suggestion is a kind of magic.”

“To name a thing is to lead away from the unique reality at hand, the living presence, and into the more familiar field of concepts and definitions by which we normally order our thoughts and reduce our perceptions to their most common and most useful denominators.”

“How then to proceed? Mallarmé believed that a certain vagueness of language and deliberate blurring of the outlines of sense and image so free the mind of the reader that he is able to look *into* and *through* rather than *at* a poem. The indefinite article or adjective is always preferred. Mallarmé does not speak of this particular flower or that one, but of ‘a’ flower.” The end he is working for — the trans-mutation of the consciousness of the reader — is magical as well as musical.”

“Mallarmé uses the physical presence of words to evoke their contrary: the nothingness and silence of the introspective void. All of his later verse, whatever the subject at hand, is charged not only with indefinite modifiers where a definite one might be expected, but also with language evocative of absence, emptiness, silence, and negation. Valéry, when he first read Mallarmé, felt a kind of occult communication from the verses although he did not in any normal sense ‘understand’ them. The mere sound, the suggestiveness of the words, their semantic aura, produced in him, as he says, a rather ‘cabalistic’ sensation of profundity. Much of this mysteriously immediate communication depends upon the play of negatives. It is as though

Deep in the mind, far back, the terms of absence and negation open a space in the reader’s consciousness where the ineffable experience of the poet is recreated and relived. The intensity of immediate experience is the quality which first attracts one to Mallarmé’s verse. In the beginning, what one feels far exceeds in meaningfulness what one understands. This initial experience may lead to

an effort at exegesis, to a search for total rational comprehension. But such comprehension, even when achieved, seldom — one is tempted to say never — heightens the subjective state of consciousness, the all-important 'suggestion,' which was first called up in the mind by the poem. Indeed it may even dissipate it." (Williams, pp. 37-38)

"We are being offered a forbidden fruit, forbidden because it liberates us from the power of those who would keep us ignorant and submissive."

"At a time when the established and academized poetry fondles itself stupid with dry perfectionism it is such a delight to know that here is a poet still willing to take the risk, to himself and to his work, to ask the fundamental questions that lie in the deep recesses of our being." (on Jack Foley's *ADRIFT*)

*"Gravitational radiation is expected to exist although it has not yet been observed directly. The quantum of the radiation has been called the graviton before observation. . . . As the Universe expanded the temperature fell. The fall from  $10^{32}$  K reduced the gravitational coupling constant and the gravitons decoupled from the rest of the material and no longer played a role in the story. The isolated gravitons cooled as the Universe expanded and they now have a temperature of order 1K."*

(W.S.C. Williams, *Nuclear and Particle Physics*)  
voice of graviton currency. "to gather paradise"

(as the gnostic Melchizedek who gathers and emits light)  
clawing the sky for breath, flesh  
perpetuates body strafing

(*"I saw on the urground-kathodes letters of human skin glowing"*)  
Chameleon geography  
scatters  
random variants  
of Metatron Cain wandering  
through musculature

"This general Serpent is also the wise Word of Eve. This is the mystery of Eden: this is the river that flows out of Eden. This is also the mark that was set on Cain, whose sacrifice the god of this world did not accept whereas he accepted the bloody sacrifice of Abel: for the lord of this world delights in blood. The Serpent is he who appeared in the latter days in human form at the time of Herod" (quoted in Hans Jonas, *THE Gnostic RELIGION*). Jonas comments: "The elevation of Cain, prototype of the outcast, condemned by god to be 'a fugitive and a vagabond' on earth, to a pneumatic symbol and a honored position in the line leading to Christ is of course an intentional challenge to ingrained valuations. This opting for the 'other' side, for the traditionally infamous, is a heretical method, and much more serious than a merely sentimental siding with the underdog, let alone mere indulgence in speculative freedom. It is obvious that allegory, normally so respectable a means of harmonizing, is here made to carry the bravado of non-conformity. Perhaps we should speak in such cases, not of allegory at all, but of a form of polemics, that is, not of an exegesis of the original text, but of its tendentious rewriting. Indeed, the Gnostics in such cases hardly *claimed* to bring out the correct meaning of the original, if by 'correct' is meant the meaning

intended by its author — seeing that this author, directly or indirectly, was their great adversary, the benighted creator-god. Their unspoken claim was rather that the blind author had unwittingly embodied something of the truth in his partisan version of things, and that this truth can be brought out by turning the intended meaning upside down.”

The figure of Metatron is discussed at some length by Gershom Scholem in his MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM. The most important deviation from the main current of Merkabah mysticism, he writes, “is the Metatron mysticism which revolves around the person of Enoch who, after a lifetime of piety, was raised, according to the legend, to the rank of first of the angels and *sar ha-panim*, (literally: prince of the divine face, or divine presence). ‘God took me from the midst of the race of the flood and carried me on the stormy wings of the shekinah to the highest heaven and brought me into the great palaces on the heights of the seventh heaven Araboth, where there are the throne of the shekinah and the Merkabah, the legions of anger and hosts of wrath, the *shinanim* of the fire, the *cherubim* of the flaming torches, the *offanim* of the fiery coals, the servants of the flames, and the seraphim of the lightening, and He stood me there daily to serve the throne of glory.’ This Enoch, whose flesh was turned to flame, his veins to fire, his eye-lashes to flashes of lightening, his eye-balls to flaming torches, and whom god placed on a throne next to the throne of glory, received after his heavenly transformation the name Metatron.”

“neural arch exposes dimensions of the creature-.

Magnetic fields swing wildly through Chaos like dissociative swarm”

“Move through chaos — dissolve the lie of the world and reappear beyond. Flood the cells until the cells evaporate. Shatter the mirrors and eat the broken reflections.” (“Creative Transfinity”) “race of angel-apes under the neural arch waves of blue lit Paradise Under the Neural Arch Tides of Paradise”

*The Enochian legend derives from Genesis 5:24: “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him”, where the Enoch in question is the son of Jared and father of Methuselah. However, the son of Cain, fathered in the land of Nod after the expulsion from the presence of the Lord, is also called Enoch.*

In the same chapter on Merkabah mysticism, Scholem discusses the Jewish tradition of the piyut, or numinous hymns. These hymns refrain from doctrine or explicit symbolism, striving instead to “reproduce in words the *mysterium tremendum*, the awful mystery that surrounds God’s majesty. . . . It is characteristic of these hymns that the traditional vocabulary of the Hebrew language, although by no means restricted in this field, no longer sufficed for the spiritual needs of the ecstatic eager to express his vision of God’s majesty in words. This is evident from the large number of original and frequently bizarre phrases and word combinations, sometimes entirely novel creations, all bearing a decidedly numinous character. . . . Great though the importance of prayer undoubtedly is for him, the Merkabah mystic who pours out his heart in ecstatic and spontaneous hymns seeks no mysteries behind the words of prayer. The ascent of the words has not

yet substituted itself for the ascent of the soul and of the devotee himself. The pure word, the as yet unbroken summons stands for itself; it signifies nothing but what it expresses."

"A poet is an individual poetic entity biologically appearing. It speaks, it bodies forth being, participates in the theater of objects. What might be the essential nature of such a pansubstantial creature can only be discovered through direct confrontation and mutual dissolution within the shared domain, the anitpersonal dynamic this union cultivates."

(Articulating Freedom)

"WE'RE DEALING WITH A LIVING

THING," HE TOLD HER, VISCERAL MIND. EXPANDING AND CONTRACTING, AN ORIFICE BLEEDING. SOMEDAY YOU'LL FEEL THE AGONY OF IT AND ABANDON FAITH FOR THE GRACE OF BODIES IN MOTION THROUGH SUPERIMPOSED ETERNITIES THAT OBSOLETE MATERIAL REDUCTION."

(on McClure)

"He is striving towards annihilation of personal destiny, to be absorbed in something that contains, yet transcends him."

"We live not so much as individuals as we would like to believe, but in fields . . . fields of war, fields of play, electromagnetic fields, fields of being, open spaces of possibility and expansion."

"Ultimately we must surrender to something beyond personal destiny, otherwise we are isolated within our own delusion and surely death will shatter that."

"This is the voice of a living creature heart beating  
seraphim wild for epiphany"

"I saw the crucified Christ with golden antlers

hanging on the wall of an Egyptian tomb 5000 years ago. His eyes were violent maelstroms"

"The earliest Vulture Cults at Catal Huyuk discovered that psychoactive chemicals, once introduced in a host, could be transferred from one gene to another, and that the altered gene pattern would be inherited by the offspring, creating mental, even external physical mutations in succeeding generations, derived from the hallucinations of the cult while originally under the influence of the same chemicals."

"a seething spray of souls in the face of chance"

"Poems like these communicate that which cannot be said precisely by not saying it. In their silence and hieroglyphically fixed attitudes these works are part of a spiritual *mime*. They reveal without discourse the 'ontological splendor' of the mystery of Being." (Williams, p. 42 — on *Salut*, "Une dentelle s'ablit", and *Sainte*)

"The true text would in some mysterious way recreate the truth of being, which is one truth, eternal, unchanging. It would be the exact symbol of the absolute. An observation of Yeats on 'all art that is not mere story-telling' is very close to Mallarmé's meaning here. Yeats says that all such art 'is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which medieval magicians made with complex colors and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles, in complex colors and forms, a part of the Divine Essence.'"

(Williams, p. 47)

“I know the secrets of the ways of the lord,  
their paths and signs”

“asleep cortex egg or albino maggots  
crawling in mushroom rot”

“I feel what the black rose’s synapse knows”  
“electric spirochete”

*Working out of a rediscovery of the origins of religion.*

*What you know is not as  
important as how you know, how you work — and  
what you think the stakes are.*

*The function of ritual is to alter consciousness,  
and the function of myth is to establish the new  
topocosm*

*Poetry, by altering conscious-  
ness, increases the territory of the actual.*

*Participating in the mutation of  
consciousness. Knowingly and willingly creating new  
dendritic  
branchings. New pathways of electrical gnosis. New  
sites of residence for the pneuma.*

*The silent polyrhythmic noise of a palpable  
nothingness, too large and fully absent for this lan-  
guage.*

*A carrier of darkness to redeem the light*

*Kundalini uncoils, there’s an electrical  
fire in the dendrites, ancient moon spores open in the  
blood.*

*Ritual renews proprioception.*

*Language moves through the nerves like blood  
moves through the veins.*

*There is such a thing as too  
much light, it unravels the seams, erases all the*

*codes.*

*As if we were seeking a  
refined, meticulous, tightly-reasoned relinquishing of  
control.*

*The cells are composed of zohar.*

*In one sense the poem serves the same sym-  
bolical function as the ‘protective circle, the mandala,’  
which, as Jung says, is ‘the traditional antidote for  
chaotic states of mind.’ It discovers the ‘preexistent  
meaning in the chaos of life,’ and draws form from  
chaos, unity from diversity.”*

*“But the poem is not only  
an image of order. It is also a *method* — one might  
almost say a device — for attaining vision into the  
absolute heart of that order. The poem is not only  
*mandala*, it is also *yantra*. The *yantra*, etymologically  
an ‘instrument for giving the mind control,’ is an  
image or geometric design used in certain systems of  
yoga to aid the mind in its movement out of time and  
space and into the absolute. In our context we may  
say that any poem which ‘entangles the divine’ [ . . . ]  
performs the same service that the *yoga* requires and  
expects of the *yantra*.*

*The yantric function of the poem exists on a  
non-discursive level. It emerges quite mysteriously  
from the sounds, rhythms, images which together  
make the whole work. On a discursive level, a poem  
may make statements *about* the absolute; on the  
yantric level, which, mistaken for *statement about*,  
may even seem nonsensical, it opens a way *into* the  
absolute.” (Williams, p. 49)*

*“The success of a poem as *yantra* is felt rather*

than understood, which is why Valéry sensed the power of Mal-larmé's work before he fully understood its 'meaning.' The *real* meaning was precisely what he had at first felt. The meaning of a yantric poem is one that the poet or the reader 'recognizes by sensation.' When Gérard de Nerval warned that attempts at explication would spoil rather than enhance the pleasure to be gotten from his sonnets, he meant what he was saying. His poem was intended as yantra. Explication too often results not so much in elucidation as in reduction of poetry from a yantric to a purely discursive level." (Williams, p. 50)

"Art is product. Politics is the singular domain of those wealthy enough to purchase a politician. Media is information commodity. Philosophy is academic currency. Education is indoctrination. History is the selective documentation of the oppressors. Science is the control mechanism of materialism. All the so-called noble pursuits of humanity are manufactured by institutions of restraint, categorization, and commodification. Like a spiral closing on itself they are constantly redrawing the parameters in diminishing perspective." (Creative Transfinity)

"We owe nothing to civilization except the free expression of our souls in an open medium."

"Self-liberation is the sole responsibility of free individuals."

"Destroy the division between reception and transmission."

"Actions occur of their own accord, why should we delude ourselves with vagaries of control. To control is to murder the soul."

"Let's start from the smallest particle of all, the syllable. It is the king and pin of versification, what rules and holds together the lines, the larger forms, of a poem. [ . . . ] It is by their syllables that words juxtapose in beauty, by these particles of sound as clearly as by the sense of the words which they compose. In any given instance, because there is a choice of words, the choice, if a man is in there, will be, spontaneously, the obedience of his ear to the syllables. The fineness, and the practice, lie here, at the minimum and source of speech." (Olson)

"'Is' comes from the Aryan root, *as*, to breathe. The English 'not' equals the Sanskrit *na*, which may come from the root *na*, to be lost, to perish. 'Be' is from *bhu*, to grow."

**"the soul is proprioceptive"** (Olson)  
"dreamed Charles Olson, / luminous and large, stood over my bed / relaying the message "UMGATHAMA"

"brambu langage

AHG PRIMINCIA SABAYI meniso SABAYI  
isosyn / (santhgroi scau awi-spuh sungvis  
nahgway/frianmus) ISHNUI AMA (hawol alahmae /  
elezay shadnre neevah unapwa)/ UMGATHAMA"

*Language coming into being, previous to meaning, to history, from primal grunt and moan through piyut and zaum to a reinvention of the origins, a re-discovery of the source, of language, in wonder at the splendor of being, in horror before the gulf between being and being's source, in awe before the vast mystery: that one might emerge in consciousness out of nothingness and absence.*

"How do we speak to one another?  
What / the imagination interjects between events /

(phenomena carry their own charge, but are / frequently displaced by vortices of sound and light / whose origins are obscured by a mirror resonance, / a catalytic debris echo of their turbulence. So we must cultivate a predictive faculty — / augry of tongues). How to utter phrases / with a cold metallic click."

"The purpose of emanation is to display the glory of the hidden God. This is achieved through a rhythm of revelation and concealment."

Daniel Chanan Matt, notes to ZOHAR: THE BOOK OF ENLIGHTENMENT

*The verb emanates the nouns.*

*What is emergent in a given moment of mind. Poetry comes into being as a rhythm of reception and release.*

"I sit reading Zohar / in dim twilight / Bag of storms / swinging from the roof"

*The poem as a creation myth, and as a ritual which reenacts the mythic moment of creation, an emanation from the realm of the boundless light, ein soph, into the*

"beautiful agony"  
"the body of space."

"letters of human skin glowing"

"tro  
foy  
dre  
soh  
hab  
ix  
ep  
col

lyr  
veen  
shar  
bwi  
stoh  
gyr  
pollux sabed gwon  
ridgsk carribdor faum . . . ."

#### UMGATHAMA

"UMGATHAMA." This is the word Charles Olson spoke to Jake Berry while looming above him in a dream or vision. It appears from time to time in

Book 2 of BRAMBU DREZI. To my knowledge, Jake has not defined the word. At some point in reading Book 2 of this work, we will need to ask: what clues are we provided concerning the meaning of this utterance?

Page 11 of Book 2 opens with these lines:

“in the vision Charles Olson,  
luminous and large, stood over my bed  
relaying the message. UMGATHAMA.”

In “Projective Verse,” Charles Olson wrote of a need to focus on the syllable as the unit of composition in poetry.

“Let’s start from the smallest particle of all, the syllable. It is the king and pin of versification, what rules and holds together the lines, the larger forms, of a poem. [ . . . ] It is by their syllables that words juxtapose in beauty, by these particles of sound as clearly as by the sense of the words which they compose. In any given instance, be-cause there is a choice of words, the choice, if a man is in there, will be, spontaneously. the obedience of his ear to the syllables. The fineness, and the practice, lie here, at the minimum and source of speech.”

“Listening for the syllables must be so constant and so scrupulous, the exaction must be so complete, that the assurance of the ear is purchased at the highest — 40 hours a day — price. For from the root out, from all over the place, the syllable comes, the figures of, the dance:

‘Is’ comes from the Aryan root, *as*, to breathe. The

English ‘not’ equals the Sanskrit *na*, which may come from the root *na*, to be lost, to perish. ‘Be’ is from *bhu*, to grow.”

“It is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born.”

From this we will take our first clue, and search among the syllables of “UMGATHAMA” for the sense. How do we break this word into its syllabic constituents? Um- ga-tha-ma? And how should we choose to accentuate it? Um-gatha-ma? Um-ga-thama. However we break it down, we begin to glimpse suggestions of words, fragments, cognates, homonymic resonances. Um could easily, within the context of BRAMBU DREZI, lead us to a con-sideration of the word OM, or AUM.

In THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GANDER, Joseph Camp-bell writes of the sacred syllable AUM:

“According to the MANDUKYA UPANISHAD, the world of the state of waking consciousness is to be identified with the letter A of the syllable AUM; that of dream consciousness (heaven and hell, that is to say) with the letter U; and deep sleep (the state of the mystical union of the know-er and the known, God and his world, brooding the seeds and energies of creation: which is the state symbolized in the center of the mandala) with M. The soul is to be propelled both by and from this syllable AUM into the silence beyond and all around it: the silence out of which it rises and back into which it goes when pronounced — slowly

and rhythmically pronounced, as AUM — AUM — AUM."

"That silence is where we are between two thoughts."

Is it far-fetched to imagine the author of BRAMBU DREZI considering such matters in relation to the word UM-GATHAMA? The second stanza of page 11 of Book 2 continues with the consequences of the vision and utterance of Charles Olson:

" . . . and launched a program of avoidance.

Delicate

exercises of absence: carefully executed to produce

the effect of invisible occupation."

From the MANDUKYA UPANISHAD:

"Om. This syllable is all. It's interpretation is that which has been, that which is, and that which is to be. All is Om, and only Om, and whatever is beyond trinal time is Om, and only Om."

"In the period of the early Upanishads," writes Campbell, "the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., it began to appear to some of the Indian titans that what was being sought by their fellows in isolation is to be found everywhere; that the inward center of absolute repose, which the forest yogis were attaining by a removal of themselves from the world, actually inhabits the world as the ground of its reality. The silence is to be heard resounding even through and within the tones of AUM."

We begin, perhaps, to discover intimations of just what might be involved in the production of "the

effect of invisible occupation."

Continuing with our exploration of the word UMGATH-AMA, and thinking within a context suggested by the word AUM, we arrive at the word "gatha." Jackson Mac- Low calls some of his performance texts "Gathas." "The Sanskrit word *gatha*," he writes (in *Representative Works*), "'verse' or 'hymn', was adopted for them, on analogy with its use to designate versified sections of Buddhist sutras and short poems by Zen masters and students, because I considered Gathas to be Buddhist performance texts." In his DICTIONARY OF ALL SCRIPTURES AND MYTHS, G. A. Gaskell describes the chanting of the gathas as "a symbol of meditation in tune with the Infinite, so raising the consciousness as to be able to recover the memory of all past lives of the ego." With this we remain within the "delicate exercises of absence: carefully executed to produce the effect of invisible occupation."

One syllable remains in UMGATHAMA: ma. Barbara Walker calls this syllable the "basic mother-syllable of Indo-European languages, worshipped in itself as the fundamental name of the Goddess." "In Indo-European root languages," she continues, "Ma was often defined as 'in-telligence,' the maternal force that bound elements together to create forms at the beginning of the world." The Persians, according to Walker, "made her name a sacred Word, formed of the letters Mourdad-Ameretat, 'Death- Rebirth.'" "The ideogram MA was said to mean a state of immortality brought about by drinking the milk of

the goddess's breast."

The third stanza on page 11 of Book 2 of BRAMBU DREZI situates the concerns of the author within the Hebrew traditions, specifically the Kabbalah:

"I sit reading Zohar  
in dim twilight  
Bag of storms  
swinging from the roof"

Walker continues her explication of the syllable "Ma:"

"In Hebrew the same sacred letters MA made the Mem-Aleph, combining ideographs of 'fluid' and 'birth.' This holy sign was credited with great protective power, and was written on Jewish amulets dating from early 9th century B.C."

The following stanza in BRAMBU DREZI begins:

"flickers in  
breast"

If we learn nothing else from the exercise of breaking the word UMGATHAMA down into its syllables, we discover at the very least that mythic and spiritual resonances run through Berry's poem from the most obvious surface statements to the veiled intimations within the phonemes. When we arrive at a page of this poem (such as page 15 of Book 2) where lists and arrays of word-fragments are scattered across the page-as-field, we might consider this as an indication of how to read these apparently nonsense passages.

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There are other possibilities as well for reading

Berry's lists of syllables and arrays of letters. In her essay, "In Praise of Nonsense," in CLASSICAL MEDITERRANEAN SPIRITUALITY, Patricia Cox Miller investigates passages from the Nag Hammadi library and the Greek magical papyri. "Using language against itself," writes Miller, "by breaking it down into its elemental parts and then reconfiguring those parts in endless permutations and combinations, the magical prayers constitute an iconoclastic piety." On page 16 of BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, we find the following sequence:

jehovah's  
coal black crows  
born in scrying lexis  
tortoise shell wires  
red oracle strewn  
emancipadancer  
careen shepring fatce  
en stoadt  
post damask collision  
treastle fabrue pocketed swi  
tro  
foy  
dre  
soh  
hab  
ix  
ep  
col  
lyr  
veen  
shar  
bwi

stoh  
gyr  
pollux sabed gwon  
ridgsk carribdor faum

Later in "In Praise of Nonsense," Miller writes:

"When ordinary language is scrambled, the 'in-sides' of the great name of God are revealed. It is not surprising, then, that for the texts under consideration here language casts a spell, and its aura is divine. One of the ways in which this conviction appears is in the alphabetical play with a name of God composed only of vowels: *Iao*, the Greek name of the Hebrew YHWH, the holiest name of God."

Many of the passages of alphabetical language in BRAMBU DREZI read like recombinations and permutations of the names of God. Writing of Abraham Abulafia, the thirteenth century Spanish Kabbalist and mystic, Moshe Idel has said: "This technique of breaking-down or atomizing the Name is the most distinctive characteristic of Abulafia's technique; the Holy Name contains within itself 'scientific' readings of the structure of the world and its activities, thereby possessing both an 'informative' character and magical powers. It is reasonable to assume that both qualities are associated with the peculiar structure of the Name. However, in Abulafia's view this structure must be destroyed in order to exploit the 'prophetic' potential of these Names and to create a series of new structures by means of letter-combinations. In the course of the changes taking place in the structure of the Name, the structure of human

consciousness likewise changes. As Abulafia indicated in a number of places, the Divine Name is inscribed upon man's soul, making it reasonable to assume that the process of letter-combinations worked upon the Name is understood as occurring simultaneously in the human soul." According to Idel, Abulafia worked with a very specific set of letters, and very specific procedures, as a means of producing his circle poems and, through their production, an enhanced state of consciousness. Idel: "The Name of seventy-two letters is recited while contemplating circles, each of which contains nine letters out of the 216 letters of the Name; one thereby arrives at a system of twenty-four circles, containing in toto all in all the Name of seventy-two letters." One of the methods employed by Abulafia was called Ma'aseh Merkavah, or the act of combining [harkavah] the letters of one Name in another, which brings about the reception of metaphysical knowledge.

On page 16 of BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, juxtaposed as if in another column to the passage previously quoted, we find the following:

"In 9th heaven  
white owls circle  
are a gate through which  
souls pass, bodies drowned  
in identity / tubes decompose  
into knowing debris, pneumaform  
seed wormed through  
Arisel's gut  
abandoned but fertile  
{ you gave me a green snake

with 72 heads  
on the garden threshold  
& the 'divine couple'  
walked riverside"

In "The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth," one of the texts contained in the Nag Hammadi Library, we find a discussion between a mystagogue and one of his initiates. In his introduction, Douglas M. Parrott writes, "the eighth and the ninth indicate the eighth and ninth spheres sur-rounding the earth. In ancient times it was thought that the first seven spheres were the realms of the sun, moon, and planets, the lower powers whose control over human life was not necessarily benevolent. The eighth and ninth spheres thus designate the beginnings of the divine realm, the levels beyond the control of the lower powers." The discourse begins with a plea by the initiate: "[My father], yesterday you promised [me that you would bring] my mind into [the] eighth and afterwards you would bring me into the ninth. You said that this is the order of the tradition." There follows a discussion of the prerequisites for attaining these states and a prayer to the one "whose word comes as [a] birth of light." This is followed by the myst-agogue's vision of the ninth sphere: "How [shall I de-scribe] the universe? I [am Mind and] I see another Mind, the one that [moves] the soul. I see the one that moves me from pure forgetfulness."

In the section of BRAMBU DREZI which begins "in 9th heaven" there is a passage, directly following the most recently quoted, which reads as follows:

Exploding circuitry of panoptic mind  
faces, ideas, turbulence whispering  
subterfuge  
reservoir  
luminous green plasma  
waves of angelic fever licks  
elec5tron-chrysalis face  
the lamb virtual stoned  
cum dried in his groin feathers  
putrefies as New Jerusalem

Moshe Idel writes that "Abulafia's way is an original one in terms of the psychological mechanism by which the new consciousness that it reaches is activated. While in the other known techniques — Yoga, Sufism and hesychasm — the goal is to attain the maximum degree of concentration by means of a generally simple formula, to be repeated over and over again, Abulafia's method is based upon the contemplation of a constantly changing object: one must combine the letters and their vowel signs, 'sing' and move the head in accordance with the vocalization, and even lift one's hands in the gesture of Priestly Blessing. This combination of constantly changing components is entirely different from what we know of these other techniques. Abulafia is not interested in relaxing the consciousness by means of concentration on a 'point', but in purifying it by the necessity to concentrate intensely on such a large number of activities that it is almost impossible at that moment to think about any other subject. By this means, the consciousness is purified

of every subject apart from the names being uttered." In passages such as the ones just quoted from BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, we find a constantly changing and shifting complexity of sources and perspectives, references and sequences of alphabetical language, all arrayed in a turbulent field, all of which seems designed to force the reader (and, we might imagine, the writer) into a sort of crowded concentration which has the effect of, if not purifying consciousness, certainly altering it. We return to the word UMGATHAMA. What, finally, can be said about such an utterance? On page 22 of BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, we find an entire field of phrases and fragments. In the center are the words, in upper case, "MALEABLE REGION." By now we can have no doubt: when we entered into this text, we entered into the "mal-eable region." In two columns at the bottom center of the page, written vertically, are the letter strings:

UMGATHAMANTHROPTERON

and, contiguous, the same series of letters written from bottom to top:

NORETPORHTNAMAHTAGMU.

How are we to read this? Patricia Cox Miller writes of Paul's concern about the Corinthians' penchant for glossolalia: "Paul, who *talks* about what the magical papyri *do*, has in his first letter to the Corinthians described basic aspects of alphabetical language. They are aspects that carry the archaic sensibility of that language, especially as it shows itself in the magical papyri where spiritual language is best and most fully preserved. The information from Paul concerns the form and qual-

ities of this language: it is ecstatic prayer that does not sound like normal language but rather like music (as Paul's repeated musical metaphors suggest — gong, cymbal, flute, harp bugle); it is not intelligible, but it is rhythmic; and it is also power-ful, for it brings manifestations of the spirit. Further, those manifestations take the verbal form not of reasonable words ('For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful') but, as we know from other sources, of strings of letters, particularly of vowels, and these somehow give expression to 'mysteries in the Spirit' (1 Cor 14:2)." On page 39 of BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, the word UMGATHAMA appears at the top, almost in the position of a title. As we read through the stanza frag-ments scattered across the page-field, through "protozoan soup" and "pregnant boiling void," we come to this couplet: "nothing is sufficient / to merit this lunacy." Writing about his experience with zerufe otiot, the Kabbalistic practice of letter combination, Abraham Abulafia has this to say: "And my spirit was enlivened within me, and the spirit of the Lord moved my heart, and a spirit of holiness stirred me, and I saw many awesome and marvelous and terrible sights, by wonders and signs. And among them were jealous spirits who gathered around me. And I saw fantastic and deceptive things, and my thoughts were confused, for I did not find there any other human beings who could teach me the path by which I ought to go. And so I was like a blind man at noon for fifteen years, and the Satan stood at my right hand to tempt me, and I was crazy because of the

vision of my eyes."

On page 20 of BRAMBU DREZI, Book 2, we read the following:

“I know the secrets of the ways of the lord,  
their paths and signs . . .’  
oblivion be my redeemer  
oblivion my shelter  
oblivion the message of my blood

Near the center of the page is an asymmetrical X, constructed of blurred and contorted letters, entirely illegible. Contiguous is a large, indecipherable glyph which looks as if it could have been made of knotted rope. On it are etched more hieroglyphic patterns, equally indecipherable. These are letters returned to the origins of letters, mute before being, naked glyphs. If they refer to anything, if they can be said to mean anything, it is their own silence, which only they are able to reveal. Abulafia wrote, concerning his practice of *zerufe otiot*: “The letters are without doubt the root of all wisdom and knowledge, and they are themselves the contents of prophecy, and they appear in the prophetic vision as though [they are] opaque bodies speaking to man face to face [saying] most of the intellective comprehensions, thought in the heart of the one speaking them. And they appear as if pure living angels are moving them about and teaching them to man, who turns them about in the form of wheels in the air, flying with their wings, and they are spirit within spirit.”

What clues are we provided to the meaning of the utterance UMGATHAMA? With this word we might

enter the lyrical complexities of BRAMBU DREZI, and encounter the astonishing beauty of its silence.

SAME STREAM TWICE: LESSER MARKS IN TAYLOR'S DAILY LOGS, "May 28.95"

"Everything that is engenders, sooner or later, nightmares. Let us try, therefore, to invent something better than being." (E.M. Cioran)

"there's more to do, in the close readings to discover how nonverbal fields envelope clusters of words with an uncanny emanation of what, not meaning, stuff Stuff, i dont know, light, energy of some sort . . ." (Tom Taylor, in a letter)

"I no longer want any knowledge that will not immediately produce an even greater ignorance." (Clark Coolidge)

"The Daily Logs" begins: "Lesser fronted dailies pique less attentive." What do we enter at the invitation of such an opening line? AGNOSIA. Less. ("Since the mid-fifties I have been interested in *agnosia*, in the kind of vision proposed by the progenitors of Meister Eckhart, like Dionysius the Aeropagite or like Hildegard von Bingen. I've always been interested in that idea that *one sees with blackness*, one sees through poverty of knowledge. It's only through the poverty of knowledge that we acknowledge our own blackness so that perceptions can happen. Hildegard von Bingen is saying that, Dionysius the Aeropagite is saying that, I think Meister Eckhart is saying that, I think Jacob Boehme is saying that, and I believe that this idea is even more common but stated in

another way in Eastern thought . . . I mean one is attempting to clear the reticular formation, to make it blank, so that perception passes over." Michael McClure, *Lighting the Corners*)

"Syntax as a rhythm of the cosmos." (Taylor)

"Lesser fronted dailies pique less attentive gasps of renoun his apple's grand & simple are now your own eyes remind me that I am. The hearts warps no less plenty than not." Asked at the outset to be attentive. Where the apple is serpent first friend of knowledge but there are no nouns in nature, so identity is an event which requires the perceptions of another, and the only repetition is lesser, less, and less. Unless we count the instance of "own," which resounds the absent "w" of renown (for now unwritten, partial, pure possibility), insisting on the fragment of "now," lessened here to "no," embedded by implication in "renoun." Renown: 1.) The quality of being widely honored and acclaimed; fame; 2.) (Obsolete) Report, rumor; from Latin *re* + *nomer*, to name. No nouns in nature, but rumors and reports of processes renamed as nouns. Identity occurs at the crossroads of another's eyes and I, process itself is plural. Therefore, "the hearts warps no [now] less plenty than not. "Hearts" sans apostrophe is the site of the singular/plural/posessive. "Warps" oscillates from verb to noun and back. There is no less plenty than not, and more than meets the eye, where sounds enact a transubstantiation of script's sense. Less plenty is pleroma, glimpsed sparks ensconced in fractured

substance. "No less plenty than not" negates the fullness of its presence in order to exist, its absence filling with the tensions of attention, *tsimtsum*. Thought emanates from text.

From Gershom Scholem: "*Tsimtsum* originally means

'concentration' or 'contraction,' but if used in the Kabbalistic parlance it is best translated by 'withdrawal' or 'retreat'." "*Tsimtsum* does not mean the concentration of God at a point, but his retreat away from a point."

The condensation of language in poetry brings us to this emptiness, reveals an absence at the center of our perceptions, the core of unknowing in the apple of our gnosis. ("Writing works in two directions. It is both an expansion and a contraction." Edmond Jabes) Scholem: "According to Luria, God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation. The first act of *En-Sof*, the infinite Being, is therefore not a step outside but a step inside, a movement of recoil, of falling back upon oneself, of withdrawing into oneself. Instead of emanation we have the opposite, contraction. The God who revealed himself in firm contours was superseded by one who descended deeper into the recesses of His own Being, who concentrated Himself into Himself, and had done so from the very beginning."

"That one is and knows one is and that it is good and that one is present in the act-event of his

being and consequent to his arousals of thought and action, resolute, perseverant and continuant. What is achieved out of the poetic, then, is directness and immediacy of one's sensations of the world." (Taylor)

The "Daily Log" dated May 28.95 continues:

"What had you done? Any more decides yr name, not as doubt, but presence." When the "you" and "yr" are read as referring to the reader, one finds a partial answer to "What had you done?" in the preceding stanza: "now your own eyes remind me that I am." Here is the "w" for the "no," one letter at a time the renown of being read occurs, and the identity of the poet begins to emerge in the eyes of the reader returned in resonance to the poet, there transliterated as an "I." Jabes again: "What I mean by God in my work is something we come up against, an abyss, a void, something against which we are powerless. It is a distance . . . the distance that is always between things . . . We get to where we are going, and then there is still this distance to cover. And a moment comes when you can no longer cover the distance; you get there and you say to yourself, it's finished, there are no more words. God is perhaps a word without words. A word without meaning."

"Any more decides yr name." Any more than enabling the identity of the poet to emerge in the reading is an insinuation of the reader into the act of writing, where reader assumes the identity of poet, and the actual writer retreats into a distance, identified as absent. "The first act of all

is not an act of revelation but one of limitation," writes Gershom Scholem. "Only in the second act does God send out a ray of His light and begin his revelation, or rather his unfolding as God the Creator, in the primordial space of His own creation. More than that, every new act of emanation and manifestation is preceded by one of concentration and retraction. In other words, the cosmic process becomes two-fold. Every stage involves a double strain, i.e. the light which streams back into God and that which flows out from Him, and but for this perpetual tension, nothing in the world would exist."

*Visionary writing is perhaps a tradition reaching back into the archaic, with links to the pre-literate, sources in the oral transmissions of epic and in shamanic ecstasy. Numerous labels have been applied over the years, all of them finally useless, though in varying degrees — romanticism, symbolism, surrealism, futurism, dada, zaum, concrete, otherstream — and this is just in the last 200 years! We begin to realize that these categories are mostly useful for those who have no intention of actually knowing the tradition, of participating in it. The situation is much as it is with religion, the source and importance of which is almost entirely obscured by the distinctions made between this one and that. It all goes back to vision, or to a sort of proprioception, the common source of these poetries and religions. Jonas insists that gnosticism is of the particular. It is as if mysticism is in fact not only an apprehension of the particular, even an encounter with the realm*

*of boundless light being an en-counter with the particular, but is also a profoundly tactile experience, each of the five senses being a variety of touch, wavelengths coded and / or decoded by different organs of the body. Even the beyond, the wholly other, if known, is known through the sensorium.. What one brings away from such an encounter is, more than anything else, the knowledge of one's own transformation. Through the particular and the tactile one encounters transcendence of the particular and the tactile. But the knowledge must be received in ways which will allow us to know it, so that what we come away with is a translation. And we know that we have been beyond, absolutely beyond, the knowable world, have been dismantled and reassembled, transformed utterly, but in the knowing we are removed from that which we wish to know. And as we continue working through the knowing, thinking, reading, writing, talking, yearning to understand the gnosis, we take ourselves farther and farther from the experience. The knowledge that we need and want is beyond knowing, though we know that, we are only near, not there, in the knowing. So at some point, if we write, we come into or towards an understanding, and the page will no longer hold the work, syntax and grammar and spelling, all of the won-derful tools of communication, language itself, is no longer a vehicle, but is a barrier. But we write, we are writers, so we begin to do battle with the language, writing becomes a violence, writing against itself. We eliminate punctuation, ignore correct spellings,*